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CHRISTOPHER ANVIL'S OUTSTANDING NEW STORY
HIGH ROAD TO THE EAST

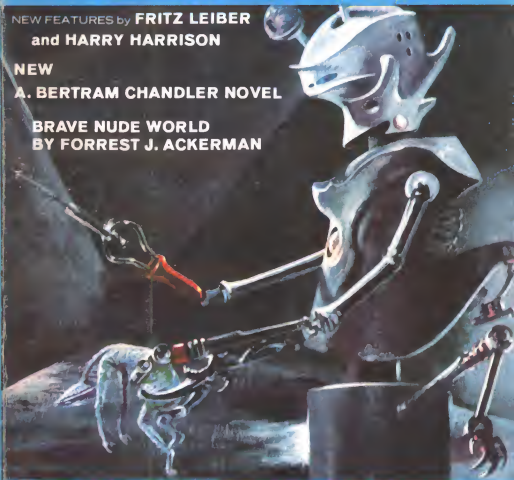
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MAY 1968 VOL 17, NO. 5

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RAISE THE ROCKET SHIP'S ANCHOR

Editorial by Harry Harrison

If science fiction is not mainstream—what is it? There are a few things it obviously is not. It is not western, though we do have our space operas, nor is it romance as in romance novel—thank goodness we have none of them in our ranks. ("Darling, you have hidden aboard this spacer and risked the dangers of the Crab Nebula just for me! Kiss me my precious spacepet . . ." What a singularly ghastly thought.) The SF novel has some resemblance to the detective novel, often there is a mystery to be solved in the end and plenty of guns and violence, but this is only a casual resemblance. The thing that SF resembles most is the historical novel. Many an SF book can justifiably be called a historical novel—set in the future instead of the past.

There is evidence for this belief. Some years ago I attended a conference of science fiction writers where, for some reason now happily lost, all of the writers present prepared lists of authors they enjoyed, and who they felt had had a recognizable impact on their own writing. There were some strange lists, and they were just about as varied as you can imagine. Of course a lot of early SF writers appeared on every list, since this was a specialized group, but aside from that the results were very mixed. I cannot recall the majority of the authors listed, but I do recall that very few appeared on two or more lists. But I do remember one man

who was on every list, the only one. He was Cecil Scott Forester.

You might well ask why. There were a sprinkling of other historical novelists on the lists, but not enough to have any statistical importance. Why C.S. Forester? The answer is not because of the many other memorable novels that Forester wrote, but because of one character, Horatio Hornblower.

The Hornblower books reek of reality, and *technical* reality. Their author has obviously sailed a good deal and loves the sea. He has made a meticulous study of the details of life during the Napoleonic Wars and the books smack of authenticity. He has done what every science fiction writer attempts to do: he has used research and imagination to construct a world he has never experienced, then peopled it with characters and written a book about it. The only difference is that Forester's books are set in the past, while the SF writer usually writes about the future. And the technical details are always of major importance.

There are other marked similarities. In SF the idea comes first and the characters who will enact the story come afterwards. This is also true of Forester, and in *THE HORNBLOWER COMPANION* he admits as much. "I can remember how Hornblower started," he writes. Forester bought three bound volumes of the *Naval Chronicle* and read and reread

(Continued on page 144)



... *but the
Egyptians
knew it
ages ago!*

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HIGH ROAD TO THE EAST

Christopher Columbus made himself famous by finding what he had not been looking for. But this sort of thing can be done once too often . . .

CHRISTOPHER ANVIL

Illustrated by GRAY MORROW

THE Admiral moved around the bridge nervously, aware of the uselessness of the compass, the latest shift of the stars, and the ugly temper of the crew. He heard the sound of a sword loosened in its scabbard, and Alfonso Gomez plucked at his sleeve.

"Sir," said Gomez, "here are the crew's spokesmen."

The Admiral looked up angrily. A barrel-chested crewman drifted in, accompanied by a swarthy, intense-looking man and a thin, frightened individual. The barrel-chested crewman spoke with great firmness:

"We want to go home."

The Admiral glared at him.

"Go home! How, as paupers?"

"Alive. We want to go back now, while we can."

"Never," said the Admiral. "We go straight ahead."

The intense, swarthy crewman spoke up. "Sir," he said, "we're loyal. We've come with you, though all the world says this latest venture is folly. But, sir, we have limits, and you stretch our strength too far!"

"Folly!" roared the Admiral,

bringing his fist down on the rail. "What did they say the first time? The truth of my idea is plain and obvious, and if you weren't frightened half to death by old women's superstitions, you'd see it!"

"Sir," said the crewman, "perhaps if you'd explain it again—?"

"It's clear as sunlight," said the Admiral, spreading his hand. "Look now, the earth's a globe." He glared at them. "Surely we don't have to go through *that* again."

"Oh, no, sir," they said in unison, "we see that."

"All right," said the Admiral. "Here's Spain, on this side. Around on the other side, here, are the Indies. And here's Cathay. If we can trade direct with them, our fortunes are made. Bring back a shipload of pepper, for instance.—Everyone wants it, and it brings a high price."

The crewmen's eyes were rapt. They nodded to show they understood so far.

"All right," said the Admiral. "Now, the Portuguese have this idea of a route around Africa. That'll work, but why bend and wind all over the surface of creation when you can go

straight!" He brought his hand out in a straight chopping motion. "Cut off all that winding and twisting. Go *direct*. Right to the goal!" His eyes flashed.

The crewmen looked uneasy. The intense crewman coughed apologetically. "We tried that, Admiral. It didn't work."

The Admiral looked pained.

The barrel-chested crewman cleared his throat. In the manner of one treading on treacherous ground, he added, "There was land in the way."

The Admiral studied the deck. There was always this being thrown in his face. "Well," he said irritably, "how was I to know that? The *idea* was right. All we had to do was make a little . . . correction."

The intense crewman nodded vigorously. "That's the part we want to hear about again. We don't understand that. Tell us about the correction again."

"Well," said the Admiral, "there we were, with that long stretch of land right in the way. It wasn't my fault. It wasn't anyone's fault. But if we went around it, we'd be winding along a length of coastline again. It'd make the journey too long. The whole idea was to go *straight!*"

The room was silent as they listened.

"All right," said the Admiral. "If you've got a gun, you don't tie the bullet on a turtle and have it crawl up and down over every little bump and rise in the ground, do you? No. You shoot it straight to the mark. And if there's an obstruction in the way, why, you just aim a little higher and loft it over the obstruction."

HIGH ROAD TO THE EAST



There was an intense silence. No-one seemed to be breathing.

"Well," said the Admiral, "so I just explained my new idea to the King, and kept after him till he finally gave me, for once, a ship that wasn't worm-eaten. And then I just—well—remodelled it a little, and got a good lot of gunpowder collected, and here we are."

"That's it," said the intense crewman. "We're here. But *where is here?*"

"Where's the bullet," said the Admiral, "before it hits the mark? We're in the air, of course."

"We've been here a long time. It seems like we ought to come down, sooner or later."

The thin, nervous-looking crewman began to whine. "I don't see why we should stand it. First, all those terrible explosions, then that wind, and nothing but float around and plug leaks twenty hours a day. Half rations, and quarter-rations, and what *good* will it do anyway? Maybe we'll never make it and we'll break to pieces on the mountains. Or maybe we're over already, *and right now we're down on the bottom of the sea and we'll NEVER COME UP!*"

"That's nonsense," snapped the Admiral. "If we were in the sea we'd feel the motion."

"Sir," said the intense crewman, moving a bit forward, "some of us have a different worry. Suppose you aimed too high? Or that freak wind that caught us—suppose it flipped us away from earth like a—a stone from a sling?"

The Admiral's face paled. Evading the issue, he said, "Don't be like the donkey."

The crewmen looked blank. "Donkey?"

The Admiral nodded. "Once there was a donkey that smelled hay over a high hill. He climbed to the top, made it over the worst places and started to descend. When he was almost there, the wind changed. He *gave up* and went back—and lost the prize."

The intense crewman frowned. "What does that have to do with us?"

"We're about there, too."

"But where's the proof?"

The Admiral shrugged. "It's in the log."

"Let us see. If you can show us, we'll go on."

The Admiral seemed to think it over. At last he gave an exaggerated shrug. He turned to Gomez, who was now staring out of the solitary small thick porthole the Admiral used for observations. "Gomez," said the Admiral, with a peculiar emphasis, "the *log*."

"Eh?" said Gomez absently. "Oh, yes sir. The log." He picked up the log and came forward.

"Not *that* one!" roared the Admiral, losing his temper. He glanced at the crewmen, looked guilty for a moment, then excessively innocent.

"*Two logs*," muttered the crewmen, looking dazed.

The intense crewman bared his teeth. "*Treachery!*" He whipped out a knife.

The Admiral's sword hissed from its scabbard.

"We stay on course!"

Gomez was back at the porthole. "Admiral," he said, "I think you're right. Look out here!"

Their disagreements momentarily forgotten, Admiral and crewmen pull-

ed themselves swiftly to the porthole and stared out.

"See," said Gomez. "That's the moon, isn't it?"

"H'm," said the Admiral. He blew on the glass and wiped a sleeve across it. There seemed to be two moons out there, different sizes and in different places. The waviness of the glass added a frustrating distortion, so that it was hard to tell what was real and what was due to the glass. "Blast the fellow that made this," snapped the Admiral. "Yes, that *must* be the moon. What else can it be?" He craned his neck to squint ahead at an angle. "Ah," he breathed, "and they called this folly! Look ahead, *land!* See there, coming closer below, a cloud drifting!"

"So it is," said Gomez, awed.

"Sir," said the intense crewman, trying to see. "Let me have a look. I was on a caravan to the East one time. Maybe I could tell where we are."

"Go ahead," said the Admiral. After a moment, he added. "What do you think?"

"H'm," said the crewman. "It's sort of red. And those lines stretching across. It can't be the Indies."

"Not the Indies?" cried the Admiral, anguished.

"It's too much like desert, sir. We must have overshot. H'm. Those lines *might* be the Great Wall.—Maybe it's Cathay."

"Well," said the Admiral, sounding relieved.

Gomez lifted a foot thoughtfully.

"We're falling sir. I don't know how I can tell, but I feel the tug of the Earth."

The Admiral squinted out the porthole again. "What goes up must come down," he said hopefully. "All right men, back you go to your posts."

"Yes, sir." The three crewmen obeyed with alacrity, relieved at the thought of land below.

The Admiral returned to the rail and bawled out, "All right now, men, get that slowmatch lit! Ready on the starboard number three fuse! But don't touch her till I give the word!"

There was a scurrying sound as his orders were obeyed. "Ready on starboard number three, sir!" Another voice called, "Slowmatch ready, sir!"

The Admiral turned and took another look out the porthole. "Awfully red," he said thoughtfully. "Well, I hope it's Cathay." He turned to shout his command and hesitated. Come to think of it, wasn't *Mars* red? He looked out again. "God, I hope I didn't discover another—" He gritted his teeth and glared out at it, whatever it was. Then he shrugged, turned away and took a deep breath.

"Starboard number three!" the Admiral shouted. "Ready now! *Light it!*"

There was a roar, and the ship turned.

"One way to find out," groaned the Admiral.

They started down.

The End

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HIGH ROAD TO THE EAST



THE LITTLE CREEPS

By Walter M. Miller, Jr.



There was almost too much at stake in the war—it meant the devastation of one world too many.

WHEN he turned out the light, the little creeps began coming down the wall again. General Horrey gurgled and fumbled for the bed-lamp chain. Brilliance flooded the room, and they vanished instantly. But the feeling of their presence lingered; it was as if they were watching him from the crack beneath the moulding. He sat up in bed, breathing deeply and glaring at the wall.

His wife's angular body stirred beside him. She rolled over and blinked first at the lamp, then at the general. "I thought you were sleepy, Clement," she challenged with a frown.

He quickly took note of the fact that she hadn't seen them. He tossed her a nervous smile. "I—I thought I'd read awhile," he mumbled.

"Why, you don't even have a book."

He swung his stout body out of bed, padded to the shelf, and returned with a volume of Klausewitz. Her colorless, middle-aged face went slack with hurt.

"Clemen-*n-n-n*, on our first night together again?"

Her own boldness caught in her throat. She blushed furiously, flopped herself over, and curled up with her face to the wall. She drew the bed-clothes tightly about her neck.

The general smiled a sickly smile. For the first time he noticed that she had taken down her tired brown hair and had tied it loosely behind her head with a thin white ribbon. He tried to frame an apt speech—*Really, Nora, aren't we a little old?* But he also framed the answer—*Yes, if you count the years we've been apart.*

He thought briefly: maybe I should tell her about the little creeps that

come down from the attic. But he dispelled the notion with a shudder. Telling people about the little creeps had already won him a transfer from the battlefield back to Tokyo. It had also won him a chronic seizure of psychoanalysis, with daily spasms in the staff dispensary. It had won him permission to bring his wife to Japan, on the theory that her presence would have therapeutic value for him. But it might get him a medical discharge if he weren't careful about it.

Nora's bags were still at the airport. If he told her about the little creeps, she wouldn't even have to pack. Still, he could not turn out the light and watch them start crawling down the wall again.

He eased himself back into bed. "Are you asleep, Nora?" he whispered hopefully.

Her head quivered negatively. He watched her glumly for a moment. Horrey was fond of his wife. Lord knows, she has been a patient soul during all those army years—a trifle unimaginative, perhaps—but gentle and devoted. He hated to see her hurt.

Quietly he bent over her and planted a small kiss on her temple. She disregarded it. He caught a faint whiff of perfume. She never wore perfume, and she always rolled her hair at night. Horrey felt suddenly worse. He had not imagined that she would consider their reunion such a special event.

He sighed and turned his attention to Klausewitz. He meant to read until she went to sleep, and then leave the light on all night. He left it on every night. He had even painted the windowpanes black so that the air-raid wardens wouldn't spot it. The

little creeps were regular comers, but he had hoped against hope that Nora's presence would drive them away.

Now what was he to do? The bed lamp would eventually have to be explained to Nora. In small matters, particularly those pertaining to his personal behavior, she was a very inquisitive woman.

He attacked Klausewitz fiercely. The dull words danced before his eyes. He devoured each of them like a separate pill that had to be taken. Then he went back and scanned the lines for sense. He found none. He became angry with his mind for its lack of discipline.

"Are you asleep yet?" he breathed.

"How can I go to sleep," she mumbled, "with you whispering at me every two minutes?"

But after a long time she went to sleep. Horrey bent over her and listened to the slow breathing, and watched the slight quiver of her thin lip. Satisfied, he laid the book quietly aside, and eased himself down beneath the covers with a sigh. He was used to sleeping with a light burning two feet from his face. It was reassuring.

General Horrey began to doze. Nora was stirring restlessly, but her presence soothed him. Suddenly she rolled over and snorted impatiently. Horrey kept his eyes closed. Then he heard the rattle of the bed-lamp chain—and the room plunged into darkness.

Stiffness shot through him. His hand twitched toward the lamp. He pulled it back. The darkness pressed upon him. He opened his eyes slowly and watched the night.

Then it happened.

The little creeps began coming down the wall again. They seeped from beneath the moulding and oozed over the plaster in downpouring waves of pale green phosphorescence. Tiny luminous rods, no larger than a pin, they moved like inchworms—arching their bodies and drawing their tails up behind them, then lurching ahead with a mechanical jerk. They marked in ranks, hundreds abreast, and they made concentric contour lines on the wall. In total effect, they reminded him of elite *Sturmtruppen* goosestepping down the *Kaiser Wilhelmstrasse*. But theirs was a slow crawl, hardly faster than the second-hand of his watch.

The room was pitch-black save for their faint luminescence. He longed to turn on the light. They hated light. It gobbled them up. But then he would have to explain to Nora.

A great hopelessness came over him, like the desperation of a trapped patrol. His jaw tightened with quiet hate. Every night they plagued him. Real or unreal, they had all but wrecked his career. They were driving him slowly mad. And now they threatened his marital happiness, if he had any.

Slowly he sat up in bed. "I'll fight them," he thought. "I'll let them come for once, and then I'll squash them!" Why hadn't he thought of it before?

He had tried to fight them with booby traps. He had sealed the moulding with putty. He had fumigated the attic. He had sprayed the wall with insecticides. In desperation, he had sprinkled it with holy water. And as a last resort, he had called in a Shinto priest to exorcise the house. Nothing had helped. But he had

never stood up and fought them like a man.

The frontal ranks were halfway down the wall now, and an attacking spearhead veered slightly off to the left—strangely—away from the bed. General Horrey arose quietly and tiptoed out of the room. He fumbled in the kitchen cabinets, searching for a spray gun and a fly swatter.

"If Doctor Sikiewitz could see me now!" he thought glumly.

Sikiewitz had been forced to the conclusion that General Horrey was having hallucinations about hallucinations, because Horrey freely admitted that the visions were unreal, and the doctor could not understand a patient who lacked faith in his own apparitions. In Sikiewitz' book, a man was never mad if he thought that he was mad. And Horrey had him puzzled. "You are only imagining that you are imagining," was his ultimate conclusion. "A hypochondriac who only imagines he is a hypochondriac." This tail-in-its-mouth diagnosis impressed the general, but left him bewildered.

"I must be getting worse," he whispered as he carried his weapons back to the bedroom.

He stopped in the doorway to frown. The wall was glowing with them now, but the entire army had swung around to follow the southern spearhead which had become a long thin tendril reaching toward a table in the corner. He hated them fiercely, but fear had left him.

Hate pushed him slowly toward them. Gripping the spray-gun, he advanced. Nora was weaving a small intermittent snore on the bed. He pushed the gun toward the advancing column and worked the plunger fur-

ously. The wall became wet with insecticide. But the little creeps marched impeccably onward, seemingly unaware of the gas attack.

Suppose they jump me, he thought. Suppose the whole swarming glow of them rush over to gnaw me to the bone. "Hellspawns!" he grunted.

He set the spray gun aside and took aim with the swatter. What if it angers them? What if they come at me in a mighty crawling slimy rage?

Whack! The weapon slapped hard against the plaster. A bright spark and a crackle! The swatter's copper screen glowed dull red when he pulled it back. But the little creeps continued their inexorable march. With a nervous moan, he continued belting them—until the wire curled up like wilted wet paper. Each time, the spark. He dropped the useless weapon across the foot of the bed. Nora's snoring broke its cadence; she groaned and tossed. He held his breath until she snored again.

The little creeps were crawling over the top of the corner table now, and the tendril split into two columns. One wriggled its way up the side of the small radio-phonograph combination. The other moved around in back of the chassis. Horrey backed slowly away, amazed at their behavior. Had their objective always been the radio?

He glanced at the moulding. The influx had stopped. The wall was swarming with their thousands, but no new battalions emerged from the woodwork. And the entire army was moving toward the corner.

"I'll wait," he thought. "I'll give them rope, lengthen their supply lines,

learn their battle plan." He sat on the edge of the foot locker to watch.

Some of the little creeps were marching through a ventilator slit and into the radio chassis. Others were pouring into the side of the record changer. The lid was up, and he could see them assembling on the turntable. Vaguely, he wondered if any known species of worms laid their eggs in vacuum tubes.

After a few minutes, the last of them had entered the set. The regiment in the record player began climbing the pick-up arm and moving toward the head. They collected there like bright bees swarm. Inspiration struck him. "I'll turn on the set and fry them," he whispered.

But before he could move, their phantom glow began pulsating slightly, growing fainter. Then he saw that they were soaking into the very metal. He covered his face with his hands, groaned, and muttered, "Sikiewitz was right."

A sudden click made him look up. The dial lights came on. The tube filaments cast their faint red glow on the wall behind the set. The turntable creaked once; it was spinning, but the pick-up arm remained on its hook. General Horrey gurgled and backed away. His .45 hung in its usual place on the bedpost. He fumbled and groped and finally got it from the holster. Quietly, he charged a round into the chamber, intending to shoot at the radio. But a faint buzz of static made him hesitate.

"It would be foolish to shoot," came a hissing voice from the loud-speaker. "Then we would have to enter directly into your nervous system. It would be most painful to you."

Cold chills tickled the general's

nape. He stood poised in his pajamas, with the gun pointed at the floor. At last he wiped small perspiration from his forehead, and whispered, "I request a parley."

"Granted," hissed the little creeps.

Slowly he advanced toward the set. The open lid of the record-player was a shadowy crocodile's jaw, waiting to devour him. He moved a chair noiselessly in front of it and sat down, placing the automatic beside him. He was stiffly at attention.

"Who are you?" he breathed.

There was a brief pause, then: "Our name is 2537 Angstroms."

The words were puzzling, but he was more baffled by the very fact of speech itself.

"How do you talk? How do worms speak?"

"By vibrating the phonograph crystal."

"Our analysis has shown that you are the key."

The answer meant nothing to him. "Where do you come from? I fumigated the attic."

"We are speaking from tomorrow."

The general caught his breath. His lip quivered angrily. He was not a man to be trifled with, not even by a phantasmagorical tribe of worms. "Tomorrow, eh?" His military mind groped ahead and found a leading question. "Where were you yesterday?"

"We were at today."

"Ha!" he breathed triumphantly. "But I was here today, and you weren't."

"True. While you are at today, we are at tomorrow."

"You lie!" he purred. "I'm coming

to tomorrow pretty soon, and I'll prove you aren't there."

"When you reach tomorrow, it will be your today. But we will still be at tomorrow."

He groped again, and drew a blank. He sat working his jaw angrily. "What are your terms? What do you want? I demand that you leave my apartment!"

"Tomorrow grows out of today," the little creeps muttered ominously. "We demand that you stop spoiling tomorrow."

"Stop spoil—" Horrey began sputtering.

A groan came from the bed. Nora had stopped snoring. "Turndroffradio," she mumbled sleepily.

There was a brief silence. Then the little creeps whispered again: "Our demands are simple. There are only three of them. Do not fire Yoshigura. Do not listen to General Yaney. Do not approve the bombing of towns along the Amur."

Horrey let an angry silence pass. Could the little creeps be some new secret weapon of the Reds? What could they know of General Yaney? The man was at the front, and Horrey hadn't seen him in months. And he had heard of no requests for strategic attacks along the Amur River. And what of Yoshigura? Yoshigura was only his housekeeper. And he had never thought of firing the man.

"Why?" he finally asked.

"Tomorrow grows out of today. Those are key decisions you must make."

"And if I agree? Will you leave me alone?"

"That depends on day-after-tomorrow."

Horrey snorted. "What if I refuse? What can you do about it?"

"Then we will be forced to go back and change yesterday."

"Turndamndradio off, Clement," came the mumble over the bed.

"I'll think it over," the general muttered to the set.

"Turnitoff, Clement."

"There is nothing to think about. We shall return again to see that our demands are met." The radio lights switched off. The little creeps began emerging.

"Who said that?" Nora gasped. "Is somebody else here?" She sat bolt upright in bed.

She jerked on the bed lamp, catching the little creeps in the process of emerging. They seeped quickly back into the metal to escape the light.

"Hah!" Horrey growled triumphantly. "Now you can't get out. You're trapped!"

"What can't get out, Clement? Who's trapped?" Nora's voice was shrill with nervousness.

The radio came on again. "Turn out the light, please," ordered the little creeps.

Nora's hand darted toward the chain, then froze. "Whoo—"

"Don't touch it, Nora!" he barked.

"Clement! What—"

"Somebody's playing pranks with our radio," he said hastily. "Leave the light on."

"Tell the female to remove the light," the little creeps commanded.

"No!"

"Who called me a female?"

"Very well," said the loudspeaker. "I trust you have an extra fuse." A shower of sparks suddenly sputtered from the back of the set.

The light winked out instantly.

Nora screamed in the darkness, and the general began cursing fluently. The little creeps oozed out of the cabinet and began inching their way up the wall. They were glowing brighter now, and moving faster than before.

"Do you see them, Nora?" he shouted hopefully. "See them?"

"Who? Where?" she cried. "I don't see anyone, Clement!"

"I—I—I—don't see anything!" Her voice was a sobbing wail. "Where are you, Clement?"

"You heard them!" he bellowed. "You've got to see them!" He lifted the automatic and aimed at the head of the column. "They're—right—there!" He jerked the trigger.

The explosion was shattering. When Nora's scream died out, plaster was sifting to the floor. The little creeps were still writhing from the brief flash of the shot. The bullet had done no damage to them, but they didn't like the light. He laughed wildly and fired again, and again.

When the gun was empty, the little creeps began reassembling. He started out of the room, meaning to replace the fuse and give them a good dose of light. Then he realized that he didn't know the location of the box. He had never bothered to find it.

Nora was moaning occasionally. "You see them?" he panted. "You have just got to see them!"

She didn't answer. He groped to the bed and felt for her arm. "Nora, Nora!" He found the arm and shook it. "Nora, answer me."

Only a moan. She had fainted. He dropped the arm and lumbered to the kitchen for a handful of matches. He began looking for the fuse box, searching each room in turn. By the

time he found it in an unusual linen closet, the little creeps had returned to the moulding.

A loud knocking was worrying at the front door. General Horrey ignored it while he shorted the fuse socket with a coin. Since no fire sputtered from the radio, he assumed the short had been a transient one. He found some ammonia in the medicine chest and went to wave it under his wife's nose.

Her first words were: "They're at the door now, Clement!"

"It's all over," he said gently. "Go back to sleep. Would you like a drink?"

"I hear them at the door."

"That's somebody wondering about the shooting. They'll go away. Just relax."

"Who was it, Clement?"

"Didn't you hear them?"

"I thought it was the radio."

"With a microphone? Where were they standing?"

"Not standing, Nora!" he groaned. "Didn't you see them? Answer me!"

She looked worried. "I—I—oh, maybe I did."

His heart leaped with glee. "You did? What did they look like?"

She frowned, as if struggling to remember. "I—I think he was a huge, dark-faced man—standing just outside the window."

General Horrey groaned inwardly. He started to bellow at her that there wasn't any man, but he set his jaw tightly. Let her believe the invention of her own imagination, he thought. It was safer that way.

The knocking ceased for a time, then recurred at the back door. He slipped on a robe and stalked to an-

swer it. A shadow stood on the steps, bowing politely. After a moment of peering into the darkness, he recognized the shadow as his clean-up man—Yoshigura, who lived in his basement.

"All right, what do you want?" he snapped.

Yoshigura's voice as a hesitant purr: "Ah, you shoot at thief, perhaps—Generar sir?"

"Yeah, I shoot at thief perhaps. Go back to bed."

"Ah, ah yes. Sir, you wish servant to bring Japanese undertaker now perhaps? To care for thief's remains?"

The general snorted impatiently. "It wasn't a burglar; it was only a cat."

"Ahhh, a ca-a-at! Yesss! Perhaps Generar wish Yoshigura to dispose of cat's remains, yes sir?"

"Go back to bed! I missed the damn cat! Is that what you want to hear?"

"Ah so?" Yoshigura bowed gravely. "Is too bad. Perhaps cat was only the rittew creeps, yes?"

The General choked and started to slam the door. But he paused, his hand clutching angrily at the knob. When he had first hired Yoshigura, he had called the man upstairs one night before he turned out the light—in the hope that the Japanese would also see the army of glowworms. Yoshigura not only failed to see the little creeps, but he also began treating Horrey with a peculiar and overly familiar deference. Now it was the servant's toothy grin that gave Horrey pause.

"Didn't I tell you to go back to bed?" he growled.

The servant bowed again. "Ah, so? Ah, Yoshigura not sreepy. Is

good time for Generar to discuss sarary increase, yes?"

"Salary! Now see here! You go—"

"Ah ah! Is perhaps best Yoshigura should speak to authorities of creep-cats that bother general, yes. Perhaps authorities exterminate creep-cats."

Horrey tightened himself into rigid fury. "Why, you scummy little black-mailer! Pack up and get out. You're through!"

The servant lost his grin. "So! You want Yoshigura to inform big general boss—"

"I don't give a tinker's damn if you do or don't!" he bellowed. "My wife was a witness to it! Now, get out of my house."

Yoshigura looked suddenly frightened. "Ah, is perhaps my mistake—"

"You're damned right it is!" he roared. "I don't go for blackmail, boy. You're fired! And be out of here before noon in the morning."

Yoshigura stiffened. He backed down one step, then bowed. "Is too bad. This time is your mistake, Generar. Yesss." His voice was quietly ominous. He turned and skulked angrily into the darkness.

For a long moment, Horrey stared after him. Something scratchy was gnawing at his throat—a strange dryness. He had just fired Yoshigura! And the little creeps said . . .

He shivered and went back to bed. Nora was miserably frightened. He spent several minutes convincing her that the "burglar" would not return. Then he turned out the light. The little creeps remained in the moulding; they had already spoken their piece.

The smell of frying bacon awoke him. Nora was already in the kitchen. In the gray light of morning, his

memory of the little creeps was like the fuzzy recollection of a nightmare.

"Have you had prowlers before?" Nora asked anxiously when he came to the kitchen for breakfast.

He noticed the dark circles under her eyes and guessed that she had remained awake for the rest of the night. "They won't come again," he said. "Don't worry about it." He meant to break the radio and pull out the plug. Then she wouldn't be aware of their presence. Or better still—

"Nora, an electrician's coming today to check the wiring. Let him in, will you?"

It was one of those rare inspirations that struck suddenly. He gloated about it on the way to headquarters. As soon as he was in his office, he called the administrative officer at general mess.

"Colonel, I believe you folks have germicidal lamps in your meat-coolers, don't you? You do? Fine! I need a spare tube. I'll send somebody to pick one up. Thanks."

Chuckling to himself, he made three more calls and finally located a fluorescent fixture. Then he called for an electrician.

"Sergeant, as a personal favor—would you do some work for me today? It's out of the line of duty, so I'll pay you for the service. Pick up a fixture at Terrence's office, and a germicidal lamp at general mess. Install it in my bedroom for me, huh?"

The electrician frowned and scratched his head. "You got a shield with the fixture?"

"What for?"

"You can get radiation burns from them things, sir. Bad on the eyes."

"Why, you can't even see ultraviolet."

"I know sir. You can't see it, but 2537 Angstroms is still hard on the eyes."

"Twenty-five which?"

"Wavelength of the black-light mercury line, sir."

"Oh. Something about that number sounds familiar," Horrey muttered. "Well, if it doesn't have a shield, get a tinker to make you one."

"Yes sir. I'll get on it this afternoon, sir. I'm off duty."

"Thank you, Sergeant."

The General was thoroughly pleased with himself. The ultraviolet lamp wouldn't keep Nora awake, and it could be easily explained as a cold-preventer. He hoped fervently that the little creeps would be as sensitive to one kind of light as to another. If so, he would have them permanently beaten.

At nine o'clock, an armed courier brought the reports of yesterday's air-strikes, along with a folder from Intelligence. The intelligence report was entitled "Analysis of New Manchurian-Siberian Power Facilities." Horrey began thumbing through the latter immediately. He had been anxiously awaiting the report for several days.

But after reading for five minutes, the general was becoming slightly nervous. The words "Amur River" occurred a dozen times in the first three pages. His mind drifted to recollections: *Do not fire Yoshigura . . . Do not approve the bombing of towns along the Amur . . . Tomorrow grows out of today . . . Our analysis has shown that you are the key.*

"Nonsense!" he snorted, turning his attention back to the report.

The gist of the whole thing was contained in the second paragraph: "It becomes evident that the Amur hydroelectric stations are working with Siberian steam-turbine installations on a cooperative basis. The two-hundred-mile belt along the river is undergoing considerable industrial expansion. The daytime power-demands of the belt are beyond the combined normal output of Siberian turbines and Manchurian hydroelectrics. Yet, these installations are handling the load. This is accomplished by a supply-timing schedule. At night, during the low demand period, the hydroelectrics are shut down. During this period the turbines take over, while the dams build up head. Then, during the heavy day-loading, they operate together, the hydroelectrics generating at nearly double-duty, thus exhausting the water-head by night-fall."

The general laid the report aside and leaned back to stare at the ceiling. Other staff-members were reading the report. Before the day was over, somebody was going to want a decision. And it would be hard to decide. Because of the cooperative power situation, it would be easy to cripple the "neutral" Siberian industry by blasting the Manchurian dams. But the river was a border. One bomb on the wrong side of the line might bring another nation into the wrong side of the war. The final decision was up to the Commanding General, but Horrey's advice would count as a vote.

"I think I'll abstain," he muttered sarcastically to the ceiling.

"Sir?"

He glanced up to see his WAC secretary standing in the doorway.

"Nothing, Sergeant," he grunted. "You want something?"

"General Yaney to see you, sir."

"Who—?" Horrey felt himself going white.

"General Yaney, sir. He's back from the—" Sergeant Agnes gurgled as a paper clip popped against the seat of her tight-packed skirt. She reddened furiously and rubbed her wound, then glared angrily at the short grinning man who slipped past her, idly flipping a rubber band.

"No girdle, huh?" he whispered. "I thought it was real. Good for you."

Agnes stalked away in a fury. General Yaney closed the door and tossed his hat at Horrey's desk. It skidded into the wastebasket and he left it there.

"Howdy, Clem," he said with a bright grin. "Don't look so petrified. I'm real."

Horrey thawed himself out with a murmur and came around the desk to shake hands. He smiled, but his heart wasn't in it. "How're you, Jim? And what on earth—"

"Am I doing in Tokyo?" Yaney planted his foot on a chair, his elbow on his knee, and his chin on his fist. "Is your sergeant married?" he asked with a wink.

"I don't know, Jim. What are you doing here?"

"What's her name, Clem?"

Horrey snorted. His eyes flickered briefly to Yaney's command-pilot wings. "You're too far back of the lines to date enlisted women, Jim. The M.P.'s would grab her. Let her alone and answer my question."

"Huh! I don't know any WAC generals. Besides, it might be amusing to tangle with the cops. Haven't

been run in since I was a second loonie."

"Jim, what—?"

"Oh, all right!" General Yaney removed his foot from the chair and sat down. "I came back with that intelligence report, Clem. I know some things that aren't in there."

"You? How come? Since when do you have sources of—"

"I don't. I got the info from the man that wrote the report. We powdered and decided to keep it off the record so it wouldn't get to Washington."

Horrey returned to his desk, frowning. "What made you do that?" he grunted disapprovingly.

The young air officer went serious. "Look, Clem, I know you're an old timer—everything above-board and all that. But this is something special. If Washington gets it, the State Department might foul the works."

"Better tell me about it."

"It's just this. We know the Amur River is mined—on the Siberian side. The mines are lined up like a bomb pattern. They're set to go off on an impulse from microphonic detonators across the river. If there's an explosion on the south bank, there'll be another explosion on the north bank. If we lay a bomb pattern down the south side of the river, another pattern will appear on the north side."

Horrey began sputtering unbelief.

"It's true, Clem. They planted the mines secretly. Liquidated the laborers on the job—all except one. One escaped. He was our informant. Do you see what it means?"

Horrey let a long silence prevail. Then he nodded slowly. "If it's true, an enemy camera man could film the raid from up the river. It would look

like we violated Siberian territory. Very effective propaganda. But what about their own installations? Won't they destroy—?"

Yaney shook his head gravely. "They've arranged the mines very cleverly. They won't destroy anything important. Just a few thousand Siberian citizens."

Horrey whistled thoughtfully. "I can see how we'd better not risk it."

"Now wait!" Yaney hitched his chair closer to the desk. "If the staff approves my plan, we can turn the tables on them. Show them up before the world. We haven't been using B-76's in low-level attacks. I want to bring two groups of them in on the deck. Buzz up the Amur at fifty feet altitude. It'll be dangerous, but they won't be expecting it. Their heavy guns can't track us that low. Directly above the bomber groups, I'm going to have a flight of camera ships. They'll film the whole operation. Then we'll have them. The films will show the 76's skimming low down the south side. The camera ships will be high enough to catch the real bomb pattern and the phoney one. Then we turn the films over to the U.N.—via an unhappy State Department."

"I don't like it, Jim."

The air force officer straightened. "And I don't like those Keg-VI rocket fighters they're making—north of the Amur. I figured up the score. Clem. It's been costing us more—in money, man-hours, and casualties—to shoot down a Keg-VI than it costs the Reds to make one. And that's a helluva note. Here we've got a chance to strike at the factories without violating anybody's neutrality."

Horrey said nothing. Yaney clapped his thighs and stood up. "Think

about it, Clem. I talked the big boss into calling a meeting after lunch. He'll probably notify you in a few minutes. I've got to do some more politicking. See you, chum." He started out, then paused. "Whatchoo say her name was?"

"Agnes," Horrey mumbled absently. "Have a good time."

Yaney stuck up his thumb and departed. Horrey slowly gathered his wits and turned to the sortie-reports. They were full of Keg-VI's and casualties. He shuddered and pushed them aside, then he answered a jangling telephone.

"Your wife, sir," said Sergeant Agnes. Her voice was frosty.

"What's the matter? Is Yaney bothering you?"

He heard her lick her lips nervously. "Uh-yes, he's still here—"

"Tell him to beat it."

Agnes was a brave girl. She told Yaney to beat it, General, sir. Horrey heard the officer chuckle and make a highly personal remark.

"Your wife, sir," the flustered girl repeated.

"Put her on."

Nora's voice was tremulous with excitement. "Clement, there are a dozen men parading up and down in front of our house. I'm afraid to go out."

"What? I don't understand."

"I don't either, Clement. They're carrying signs. In Japanese. And there are six little children; they have signs too. A crowd's gathering."

"Pickets! What in the name of—!" He paused. "Has Yoshigura left yet?"

"Who?" Oh, the servant you fired. Yes, he was gone when I got up."

Horrey cursed inwardly. He knew what was up. Every time an American

fired a Japanese, all the offended employee had to do was to take his beef to the local Communists, and the Reds arranged for pickets provided the man would team up with the party. But he had always imagined that Yoshi was a fervent nationalist.

"Don't worry about it, Nora. I'll send a couple of M.P.'s to keep them from bothering the house. We can't run them out of the street, though."

"Do hurry, Clement. I'm worried." She hung up.

"Agnes, get me the provost marshal," he bellowed.

"Yes, sir," she called.

Horrey drummed impatiently on the desk. It looked like a bad day. Pickets!—it was humiliating! Especially the children. Yoshigura didn't even have a wife, but the kids would be carrying signs that read, "HORREY FIRED OUR FATHER" and "HORREY TOOK AWAY OUR BREAD" and "HORREY GROWS FAT WHILE WE STARVE". It was sickening.

"Provost Marshal's Office, Colonel Robin," croaked the phone.

"Colonel?—General Horrey. Could you get me two guards for my front porch? I've got a picket line."

The phone hesitated. "Commie trouble, General? Certainly, sir. I'll supply the guards immediately. But the commanding general has issued a new ruling on this business. Have you seen it?"

"Probably been across my desk," Horrey grunted. "I don't remember it."

"Well, the gist of it is: we're to expose this racket wherever we can. Air it on the radio, in the papers. Did you fire somebody, sir?"

"Yeah. My houseboy tried to blackmail me. But listen, I don't want anything aired, Colonel."

"Blackmail, eh? Well I can see how publicity might be embarrassing in that case. Nevertheless, the commander's rule insists that I take your statement and statements from witnesses. It's not up to me, sir. It'll go to his desk. He'll decide. We're trying to show these Red pickets up for phonies. Tell the people the truth. Why don't you speak to him, sir?"

Horrey paused. "I'm sorry now that I called you, Colonel."

"Well, there's nothing I can . . ."

"I know, I know. All right, I'll make a statement and leave it with my secretary. You can send someone out to get Nora's story."

"Thank you, sir. I'll get the guards right over."

Horrey called Agnes in. She was still blushing, and when she came through the door he caught a glimpse of a leather flight jacket in the ante-room.

"Yaney still out there."

Her blue eyes suffered toward the ceiling. "Ye-e-ss, sir."

"What does he want?"

"I—uh, well—" She wallowed hard.

"Mmph! I see. Well, get rid of him somehow."

"He won't go unless I give him a date."

"Then give him one," Horrey growled. ". . . if you want to," he added hastily.

"I'm not supposed to—go with—I mean—"

"Then type yourself a set of orders assigning yourself to his command for the rest of the day. I'll sign them."

"I'd be more fun to be chased by M.P.'s, Clem," drawled Yaney from

the doorway. "But then again — 'to my command'—hmmm—"

Even the roots of Agnes' blonde hair turned red. She stuttered helplessly.

"Why don't you get out of here, Yaney," Horrey growled.

The air officer grinned. "Hear your wife's being picketed. I've never met your wife, have I?"

"Then why don't you go meet her. Go anywhere. But just get out of here."

"My, my!" purred Yaney. He backed away. "See you later, honey."

Agnes nodded imperceptibly. "If it's an order, sir." Her voice was acid, but her eyes were pleased.

When Yaney was gone, the general dictated a statement leaving out any mention of the creeping things and using his wife's imaginative description of a burglar. "Yoshigura asked for a salary increase, and threatened to reveal to superior officers that I was firing at what he supposed to be an hallucination," he said. Horrey made it as brief as possible and padded it with no untruths. He was trusting in Nora to confirm it.

A few minutes later, a note came in from the commander ordering a staff meeting for one o'clock—"To discuss intelligence report 73-G." Horrey felt incapable of making a decision on the Amur River targets. He felt incapable of anything more than a stiff drink.

Again, Nora called. "When are the guards coming?" she wanted to know. "The crowd's getting bigger. I'm frightened, Clement."

"They should be there in a few minutes, honey. Don't worry."

"All right, but I wish you'd come."

"I'll check with the provost again," he promised, and hung up.

The provost marshal reported that a jeep was on its way. Horrey returned to his sortie reports. He was beginning to wish that he had not fired the servant.

During the lunch hour, he called a driver and cruised in his staff car within a block of the house. There was a crowd all right, but not of alarming size. Pedestrians who wandered past bunched up in the street to stare at the pickets and exchange words with them. There was no disorder, and he caught a glimpse of two white helmets on his porch. Nevertheless, it made him hotly angry. He longed to drive through the rabble with blaring horn, stop at his doorstep, and walk inside with a contemptuous sniff at the Reds. But reason told him to drive on.

"Drive on, Corporal," he sighed. "Officer's Mess, I suppose."

Promptly at one, the staff convened. For purposes of salesmanship, Yaney had reattired himself in smart and proper uniform, discarding the leather jacket and the fifty-mission crush. Horrey had never seen him in any pose but that of a slouching, tobacco-chewing combat officer, and the contrast was startling. His voice had gone polite, and he argued with a quiet eloquence and a scholarliness befitting a Pentagon official. Horrey noticed that the commanding general was impressed.

"Gentlemen," Yaney said quietly. "I will not try to impose upon you the notion that bombing the Amur is politically safe. It is not politically safe. But every decision—however small—has its reflection in the political mirror. We make them every day,

down to the least gun-toting dogfaced Gee-Eye, we make them. Who was it that said, 'War is an extension of politics'?"

"Karl von Clausewitz," Horrey grunted automatically.

"Yes. As I said, if we rely upon the State Department to make up our minds on every issue with a political aspect, then it would be militarily wise to move the State Department offices to a dugout just behind the battlelines."

The room laughed. The commanding general spoke with quiet sharpness: "Let us have facts, Yaney. We are not here to criticize politicians."

Yaney presented his plan to avoid another nation's entry into the war. "We will strike for the southernmost parts of the dams. Even the civilians who witness it from the Siberian bank will be able to see that our aircraft did not cause the explosions on the north bank. Our bomb run will be low enough to clearly define our pattern from the phoney. To me, gentlemen, it seems foolproof. They simply don't anticipate any low-level attacks."

"You'll use delay fusing, I suppose," murmured an officer.

"As short a delay as is safe, sir. We'll want our cameras to catch both the formation and the explosion patterns in the same picture. I can't see how this project should require State Department approval—any more than we need their approval to shoot Russian 'observers' fighting with the ground troops." Yaney nodded that he was finished and sat down.

There was a short silence. The commanding general seemed immersed in deep thought. At last he spoke, slowing, distinctly. "We cannot, must

not, exceed our authority, gentlemen. We are soldiers of a republic, gentlemen, subject to the nation's will. What we must decide is this: are we offering another nation an excuse it wants to attack us openly? If so, then we must submit the problem to the President. If not, we are free to strike. I want opinions from each of you, before I state my own." He looked slowly around the room. His eyes paused on one man. "General Sorrell, how do you feel about it?"

Sorrell was a cautious officer. "I'm against it, Sir," he said, and stood up to expound.

But the commander waved him down. "Arguments later," he said. "I want a preliminary poll. General Horrey, how about you?"

Horrey jumped. He felt his hands quivering. The Yoshigura incident bothered him; an embarrassing situation had grown out of nothing. Tomorrow growing out of today. And the warning—

"Well?"

"Uh, may I reserve my opinion for a moment, sir?" Horrey asked. "I'm still weighing it."

The commander nodded and moved on. "Quinnly?"

"I'm for it, sir."

"Moswell?"

"For it, sir."

"Stinwald?"

"Decidedly against, sir!"

"And now back to you, Horrey. Have you made up your mind yet?" The commander's eyes twinkled teasingly.

"What's the vote, general?"

"Two and two. You're the key."

"Key—!" Horrey shuddered and sat bolt upright.

"Something wrong?"

They couldn't do this to him, he thought angrily. The damned little creeps telling him how to run his share of the war! The hell with them!

"I go along with General Yaney, sir," he growled.

The Commander chuckled. "Be-lated, but forceful enough. Well, gentlemen. I'm happy to say I agree with the majority. But the meeting's still open, if the minority wants to change our minds."

Sorrell and Stinwald both shook their heads. The commander looked at the air officer. "Go to it then, Yaney. How soon?"

Yaney blushed. "All the crews in the 650th and 524th groups are on standby. The weather's perfect today, sir, and the wing commander is just waiting for my radiogram. I can get the mission under way without leaving this building."

The commanding general failed to crack the faintest smile. He nodded soberly and stood up. "Good day to you," he murmured, and the men came to their feet as he left the room.

It was finished. Yaney came across the room to thank him for his support, but Horrey only muttered as his hand was wrung. Tomorrow was a fast-growing little petunia indeed, he thought grimly. And the little creeps weren't going to like it very well.

Yaney accompanied him back to his office. "I think I'll go out and look at your pickets, Clem," he said with a grin. "I want a picture of that—to show your grandchildren. Show 'em how Grandpa persecuted the proletariat."

"I don't have any children. How can I—"

"Oh, nuts. I'll speak to your wife about that. Anyway, I'll be there

when you get home. I'm taking Agnes off your hands for the afternoon. We're going out and drink your whiskey and eat your chow. And torment your spouse. Be prompt for dinner, old man."

Horrey purpled. Agnes was coming out of the office as they approached. She handed him the orders he had told her to type.

"Where do you think you're going, Sergeant?" he growled, eyeing her handbag.

She looked confused. "But, sir—General Yaney said you said I was to go!"

"Well, Jim?"

Yaney grinned. "Say it, Clem, so I won't be a liar."

Horrey sputtered for a moment, then: "All right, beat it, but stay out of trouble. This is Tokyo, not . . ." He signed the transfer order.

"Ain't he chicken?" Yaney said to the sergeant. He took her arm and marched her away.

The phone was ringing when he entered the office. Lacking a secretary, he answered it himself—although a file-clerk was rushing toward it with a handful of papers.

It was the commander himself. "About this picketing business, Horrey. It's just come onto my desk. Would it embarrass you if I released it to the press? It's not your statement so much that's important, but the police checked up on Yoshigura. He doesn't have a family at all, and it's the first opportunity we've had to expose this silly children's picketing for their "father".

Horrey paused. The Red propaganda campaign must be rather important, he thought, if the commander was handling such matters per-

sonally. He usually left such details to his press staff.

"No more embarrassing than the pickets themselves, I guess, sir."

The commander thanked him and hung up. Horrey glanced at his watch. In half an hour, he was supposed to stretch out in Dr. Sikewitz's office for a session of refined psychic torment. The thought of it made him angry. "Only imagining that I'm imagining, eh?" he muttered. "Well, I won't go." He strode to his desk to begin the afternoon's work.

He was buried in a pile of maps and arguing with his aides when his wife called again. She said only one word: his name.

"What now, Nora?" he growled irritably.

The receiver rattled in his ear as she handed the phone to someone. But there was another level of sound that came to him faintly—shouting, and the rattle of broken glass. Then someone was panting into the phone.

"Howdy, Clem," said Yaney's voice. "Guess I started me a revolution."

"What? What are you talking about? What's that noise, Jim?" Horrey demanded.

"Keep your britches on, old man. Don't worry, I called the provost marshal. He's sending up reinforcements."

The general's bellow shook the office furniture. "What the hell have you done?"

"Easy, boy, easy! I'm trying to tell you. Aggie and I got here half an hour ago. Those bums in the street thought I was you. You should have heard what they called me. Maybe you'd understand it. I don't speak—"

"Are you trying to tell me that you—"

"E-e-easy boy! No, I'm not trying to tell you that. I . . . conducted myself as an officer and a gentleman. I merely sneered and led Aggie inside."

Horrey heard the sound of two shots in the receiver. "What's that?"

"M.P.s had to shoot another Jap, I guess. Anyway, it was when I went back out with a camera that they got rough, Clem. Like I said—pictures for your grandchildren. They didn't want their pictures taken. They got real nasty. One of 'em threw a rock. I even took that. But when they jumped the fence and grabbed my camera, I didn't like it. They busted it on the sidewalk, Clem."

The general breathed ominously into the phone and waited.

"Had a hard time getting that camera, Clem—an f-1.5 German job. Had to knife a *Schutzstaffel* major for it: that was the time I bailed out over Belgium—"

"Slip the baloney! What happened?"

"They busted my camera, Clem."

"And so you threw a fist at one of them."

"One! Don't tease me, Clem boy. I laid out four of them before somebody clipped me with a piece of pipe. Boy, I've got a head! The M.P.'s started out to break it up, and the pickets broke for the street. They tried to break through the crowd. Some of the crowd tried to grab them; and some others wanted to help them get away. So we got a riot. Big free-for-all. Everybody's outraged at somebody. Once in a while some crank jumps and bolts for the house, yelling 'Banzai'. Still think I'm you,

I guess. M.P.'s sit on the steps waiting for help. They just shoot the ones that charge—in the legs. Three Japs kicking on the lawn now. Heh! It's a good fight, Clem."

Horrey scorched his ears with thirty seconds of abuse. "If anything happens to Nora, I'll—"

"Yeh yeh, sure! She's all right, Clem. I'll take care of her. I always pack a Berretta—little seven-millimeter automatic I lifted off an Italian—"

Horrey hung up. He put on his coat and hat and started out of the office. Again the phone rang. He answered it in the anteroom.

"Colonel Robin, sir," grunted the provost marshal. "There's an unfortunate development—"

"Yeah, I've heard about it."

"Tell me, sir—if you'll pardon the inference—is General Yaney, well, is he mentally—"

"He's a killer, Colonel," Horrey growled, wondering why he should defend the man. "He's a combat officer and an ex-fighter pilot. He lives for brawls, and gets paid for it. That's all."

Robin glumpled disapprovingly. "Well—I'd advise you to stay in your office until we get this cleared up, sir. There's something in the wind. All day long there've been Red meetings in the city. yours isn't the only case. I don't know what's afoot, but their rabble-rousers say the allies are about to pull a sneak attack on Russia. Sounds like the fifties doesn't it—before the half war?"

"Where did you hear about this?" Horrey asked coldly. "Does the commanding general know what they're saying?"

"I've sent him a report—"

"Call him immediately, Colonel.

This may be more important than you think."

"Sir? Why—we're not going to bomb Russia, are we?"

"Colonel, I couldn't possibly answer that. But call the commander immediately!"

"Yes sir. Let me suggest again, sir, stay away from your house until the trouble's over."

"Yeah." General Horrey dropped the phone in its cradle, readjusted his hat, and paused in the doorway.

"If anyone wants me," he said to a filing clerk, "I'll be at home."

There was a radio in Horrey's staff car. It was tuned to the G.I. station as he climbed into the back seat and ordered the driver to take him home. The announcer was giving a mocking account of the child-pickets in front of his house, and furnishing a description of the riot: "And we see how the Communists have managed to build the firing of a small-time black-mailer into a bloody and brutal demonstration," said the radio. Then it mocked Red claims of an impending attack on Russia.

"Turn it off, Corporal," the general ordered. He was deeply disturbed. How had the Commies known about the Amur raids?—or were they only guessing? It had not been decided until the staff meeting, and yet Robin said that the demonstrators had been at it all day. Was it possible that they had seen the intelligence report and had guessed what the staff's decision would be? Was there a leak somewhere in the intelligence service itself?

Horrey felt somehow that he had walked into a trap. If the Reds knew that the General Staff was aware of the mined river, then they might

take counter-measures of some sort. The intelligence report made no mention of the mines, however. Yaney had brought the story orally. If there was a leak, it was bound to be in high places.

A grim and suspicious idea struck him, but he dismissed it immediately.

They were approaching an intersection near Horrey's home, and the driver slowed to a crawl. Two jeepsful of M.P.'s flashed past the corner, and Horrey saw a pedestrian slip around the edge of a building and turn his back while the jeeps went by. The man's hat was pulled low over his eyes. When the police were gone, the man stepped around the corner again. Horrey could see the edge of his sleeve as he stood watching the melee in the next block. There was something familiar about the man.

"Shall I go on, sir?" asked the driver. "It sounds kind of rugged."

There were sounds of shouting, but only an occasional shot. He could not see the riot for the buildings, but a few running pedestrians burst past the corner.

"Pull up to the curb," he murmured. "I'm going to get out for a minute."

The driver looked startled; his eyes protested the impetuosity of it, but he said nothing.

"You have an opinion, Corporal?" Horrey grunted.

"Yes, sir. My .45 is in the glove compartment. Would you care to borrow it?"

Horrey smiled faintly as he climbed out on the sidewalks. "I didn't get my rank for marksmanship, son. Fact is—I couldn't hit a bull in the butt with a paddle." He started away.

"May I come then, sir?"

"If you like." Horrey strode quietly toward the bit of coat-sleeve that protruded around the edge of the building. The man was watching the fight, and his head was turned away as the general drew up beside him. The man was grinning contentedly at the scattered scene of violence. A few were lying in the streets. The fist fights were breaking up, and the combat area was spreading out as the police wielded their clubs. Bruised and bloody battlers were stealing away from the trouble-spot.

General Horrey stared grimly at the back of Yoshigura's neck. "Enjoying the fight, eh?" he growled in a low voice.

"Ah, yesss. Justice is . . ." The servant's voice trailed off. He looked around slowly, and his sallow face contorted with shock.

Horrey's red countenance darkened with slow anger. He was not agile, but the Japanese was too surprised to duck the meaty fist that the general threw. The jarring *thuk* of the blow was most satisfying. Yoshigura fell clumsily and rolled into the gutter. He got to his hands and knees, and blood was draining from his mouth and nose. Horrey congratulated himself for still being able to deliver a good punch at the age of fifty.

"Get up!" he grunted. "I have an idea the cops would like to see you about a matter of espionage." It was only a guess. Living in Horrey's household, the servant might gain access to a lot of small-talk and idle remarks that would give the Reds an insight into staff matters. By careful piecing together of this-and-that, they might even have been able to deduce the

staff's decision on the Amur matter before the decision was made.

Yoshigura climbed slowly to his feet, breathing hate. Suddenly he turned and screamed something in Japanese toward the rioters. Horrey waded into him with a curse. His heavy fists crashed into the servant's body like unimaginative battering rams. Yoshigura went down gasping, and came back up with a knife. He slipped forward, catlike. Three rioters were running toward them, shouting angrily.

Horrey grabbed at the knife-arm as the blade slashed at his tunic. The point dug into the flesh of his side. A gunshot exploded at his elbow, and Yoshigura went down screaming. He clutched a shattered ankle as his foot flopped loosely and turned aside.

"Thanks, son," he grunted to the driver. "Watch those three coming there."

"They're stopping, sir. They see we're armed. Are you hurt badly?"

He examined his slashed tunic, and unbuttoned it to peel back a bloody shirt. There was a ragged, painful gash, but it wasn't deep. "Nothing much," he grunted. "Load this joker in the staff car, Corporal. Take him down to Colonel Robin. I'll call the colonel from the house."

"Uh—sir—"

"What?"

"Do you mean to walk through that brawl, sir?" The driver looked worried.

"Yeah, you can't drive through it. Now hurry."

The driver shrugged and offered his gun. Horrey hesitated, then took it. He started toward his house while the corporal dragged the howling

Yoshigura toward the car. The three rioters who had answered the servant's call for help stood fifty feet away, apparently not watching him.

Whistles were still bleating occasionally, but most of the crowd had dispersed, and only a dozen rioters lingered to battle the M.P.s. They were not attacking, but only trying to escape encirclement and resist arrest. The area was lightly sprinkled with the bodies of the wounded or dead.

The three men were too immobile to suit the general's ease. He shied away from them and, gun in hand, he started across the street. Suspicion made him look back. One of the men was lowering a pistol on him. Horrey halted. The bullet fanned past his chest. The man crouched and prepared to fire again. The other two darted aside. Fury made a great calmness within him. He stood sideways and lifted his weapon like a duelist. The Japanese tossed two nervous shots at him. Horrey felt their wind, and felt scorn for a man who was even a worse marksman than himself. He took slow aim, then emptied the gun at his assailant. The man dropped and the pistol skidded in the street. Another man dived for it. Horrey moved quickly away.

A small *crack* came from the direction of the house, and the second man somersaulted and lay still. The third fled. Horrey marched homeward. Yaney was leaning on the gatepost, blowing smoke off the muzzle of a tiny automatic. He grinned.

"Scuse me for horning in on your fun, Clem."

Horrey thanked him grudgingly. The trouble with Yaney, he thought, was that the man really did regard it as fun. Violence was his meat.

"Where's Nora?" he asked as they trotted up the steps of the American-style house that had once belonged to a small-time Jap industrialist.

"Heh! In bed. Said she was sleepy. Funny time to get sleepy."

Horrey sighed. It was Nora's way of handling any situation with which she couldn't cope. She went to bed, curled up in a knot beneath the covers, and slept until the situation went away. Sometimes she made peculiar noises in her throat and with her lips—smacking sounds that reminded the general of a nursing infant. During such periods, she seemed to lose touch with reality, and behave with a childlike naivete.

And sometimes, the general thought, it would be nice to crawl in and curl up beside her. But he never thought about it at length.

Sergeant Agnes arose nervously as they entered the parlor. She was trying to compromise between Yaney's informality and the presence of her boss. The pretty blonde was obviously uncomfortable in her immediate surroundings. Yaney caught it and laughed.

"Does he make you snap to, baby?"

Agnes eyed her boss miserably and turned bright scarlet. She could neither tell one general to go to hell nor be strictly formal with the other. Horrey pitied her. She was probably the best soldier of the three, he thought. He wanted to tell them both to beat it, but then he would be alone, waiting for darkness and the little creeps.

"Sit down, Agnes," he murmured, with some embarrassment. "This is my home. If you act like we were in the office, I'll shoo you both away."

Agnes sat down, and Yaney crackled. "Come on, baby," he said. "We can take a hint."

"No, no!" Horrey said hurriedly. "I want you to stay, really." Casually, he tossed his tunic across a chair and removed the insignia from his shirt collar.

"Ah, a civilian now," Yaney chorled.

He flushed. He and Yaney wore the same stars, but Yaney's meant something entirely different from his own. Yaney's stars were really scars; he liked to display them only as symbols of a fight he had won by hacking his way up from a low place to a high place. To Horrey, his rank meant that he had a higher obligation in man's quest for a better world, as obligation to authority. Sometimes, he wondered how any change would be wrought in the world when men like Yaney really wanted to fight. He went to care for the wounded, and returned quickly.

"When are you going back to the mainland, Jim?" he asked quietly.

"That depends, Clem." He sat on the arm of Agnes' chair and grinned. "I meant to lead the Amur raid at first. And then I got to thinking. When Russia strikes back at us, the staff will want me here for a pow-wow."

Horrey stiffened. "What do you mean—'when they strike back'?"

Yaney looked impatiently amused. "Really, Clem—you don't believe all that guff about this raid being safe?"

Horrey stalked forward to loom over him. "What do you know that you didn't tell us?" he demanded.

Yaney frowned. "Nothing. Nothing at all. I told you the whole

story, Clem. Isn't that enough to convince you?"

"No, it's not. I thought the camera ships assured—"

Yaney scoffed. "Stop and think! How long will it take to get the camera-ships back from the raid, develop the pictures, televise them to Washington, and finally get them to the U.N. and to the world? And then think how long it will take for Moscow to get a flight of bombers in the air after they get a wire from Siberia."

The general sputtered. "Now wait, Jim—your planes will call back a strike report from the target area. It'll be relayed immediately through here to Washington. Within an hour the story'll be in the newscasts."

"Without pictorial proof, Clem! Migawd, man! Do you think for an instant that an undocumented radio-story will stop the Kremlin from declaring war immediately? Why do you think they planted the mines? They wanted an excuse. Will they wait for us to shatter their excuse? Hellllll!" He gave Horrey a you-can-do-better-than-that-smile.

Horrey sat down heavily in shocked silence. Yaney laughed at his white face. Agnes was looking from one to the other in mystified silence.

"Lordy, Clem, wake up! Didn't you know what you were voting for? Everybody else knew, I'm sure. Naturally nobody could come right out and say that the staff itself was deciding on a declaration of war."

Horrey choked. "I—I was warned against you," he hissed.

The air officer chuckled. "By Sorrell, I'll bet. Don't take it so hard, Clem! War's inevitable anyway. And now we've got a way of knowing

when it'll happen—an advantage we wouldn't have otherwise."

"We won't have it. Who knows, besides us?"

"The air force commander in Europe knows, Clem."

"How?"

"He was my group commander in '43. We're old buddies."

"And you flew over for a Global Strategy meeting two weeks ago!"

"Right. He's on the alert. We talked. As soon as the Kremlin howls war, he'll get thirty groups on the way. And Clem, my own entire command is on the alert—every plane in shape, every crew on standby. I've pulled our punches on the Asian front lately, to conserve striking power. We are ready to deliver—and it won't be T.N.T. We can make our own decisions on atomic weapons now, you know."

"How many—?" Horrey gasped.

"Eighty-six U-bombs and a dozen H's. Plus smaller stuff. Every city of any size gets a dose of Uranium. Big ones get hydrogen. It's blunt, honest, simple."

"Washington will have your skin, Yaney!"

"Maybe. If it does, it'll have yours too, and the C.G.'s. We're talking about the Amur, remember. That was your decision. This other stuff is just hypothetical strategy. And what will Washington do when it's over? Will they point the finger at us and howl—'It's their fault, World, not ours!' Now, wouldn't that be silly!"

"I'm going to fight you, Yaney!"

The air commander stiffened haughtily for a moment. But he relaxed, smiled, and glanced at his watch. "In half an hour, the first squadrons will be over the target. I wish I were

with them." Then he grinned at Agnes and added, "If it weren't for present company."

The WAC seemed not to hear him. "I've got a brother in Europe," she said tonelessly.

Yaney shot her an uneasy glance. Then he brightened. "Can you cook, kid? Why don't we get some chow? All this war talk gives me an appetite."

She nodded expressionlessly and left for the kitchen. Yaney started to follow. Horrey called him back quietly.

"Jim, we've been friends for a long time. Tell me—doesn't this bother your conscience?"

Yaney stared at him thoughtfully, then shook his head. "You believe in peace, don't you, old man?"

"I do."

"Yeah, that's what they all say, Clem. It's popular to believe. Unfortunately, the believers can't feel it. Now you tell me, Clem—what's the difference between a man and a turnip?"

Horrey's face remained impassive. He said nothing. Yaney answered himself.

"A turnip got to be a turnip by sitting still and not bothering anybody. It dealt with its enemies by learning to be unobtrusive and modest. That's why a turnip can't fly an airplane or dance a jig." Yaney winked and strolled off toward the kitchen.

Horrey stood looking after a man who believed fervently in the institution of war, and Horrey decided he had no comment. He went to call Robin about Yoshigura. Robin had the servant under questioning.

"It may be possible that other

house-servants have been passing snatches of information to the Reds, General," Robin told him. "We're checking. But we're in a bad situation at the moment. We gave the Commies three dead martyrs in front of your house. They're not wasting any time exploiting it. They're organizing demonstrations all over the city. Somebody heaved a grenade through the newspaper window—for mocking the child pickets. Fortunately, they didn't have sense enough to pull the pin."

"Unfortunately, you mean!" Horrey grunted.

"Mmm? Why, sir?"

"Because that means it wasn't tossed by a Red. A party member wouldn't be so stupid, Robin. It means they've got allies outside the party—misguided nationalists, maybe."

"Maybe you're right!" Robin admitted.

"Thank God it's your worry, not mine."

"It may be yours too, sir. I can't leave you more than one guard tonight."

"Don't leave me any!" Horrey snapped, and ended the conversation.

He wandered into the bedroom. Nora was bundled in the bedclothing. She was asleep, but her white, thin face was pinched into a tight frown, and her throat worked slowly as if she were swallowing. Her jaw made a slow chewing motion. Once, while he stared, she shivered from head to toe and made a queer clucking noise with her tongue. Funny, he thought, how a forty-year-old woman could suddenly become an infant.

Or try to be a turnip. But Yaney's homily irritated him. "Haven't I al-

ways cried for peace?" he asked himself. "Haven't I favored it in speeches before luncheon clubs, and spoken for it at press club meetings?"

Even the little creeps seemed to want peace.

Then he glanced down at his khaki-covered chest, with its slight paunch, and his pink trousers beneath the waistline. "Then why the hell am I wearing these?" he wondered.

He paused for a moment in the bedroom, then glanced at the ceiling. He grunted in surprise. The sergeant had actually come and installed the germicidal fixture, despite the riot. Evidently he had finished early. Horrey nodded approvingly and went to join the others.

At seven o'clock, the phone rang. It was for Yaney. The command pilot took the phone, listened for a moment, nodded once, and replaced it on the hook with a click of finality. He turned, looking seriously pleased. "It's done, Clem. Strike report's in. Good results."

"The mines, man! What happened?"

Yaney smiled. "As anticipated. Better keep your radio on."

Horrey accepted the situation with quiet resignation. He watched the younger man curiously for a moment, then: "We'd better not leave. I suppose the commander will want us."

Yaney nodded. "As soon as the Kremlin speaks, probably." He glanced at Agnes. "Sorry we can't go out, kid."

Agnes, however, looked relieved. They went to sit in the parlor and wait, smoking nervously, and exchanging quiet talk.

At eight-thirty it came. First the telephone rang. Before Horrey reach-

ed it, the radio music faded, and an announcer said: "We interrupt this program to bring you a special bulletin. American diplomats in Moscow are being handed—"

"You did it, Yaney," Horrey said quietly. "I'm glad I didn't."

The air officer's eyes were sad, but without admission of guilt. "It's for the best, Clem. I'm not sorry."

"...claration of war, according to Moscow Radio," said the announcer.

Horrey went to answer the phone. While he was speaking, the city's sirens began sounding the black-out warning. When he returned to the parlor, they waited expectantly.

"Let's go to headquarters," he said.

Horrey left word with the M.P. on the porch that he was to be called in the event of trouble, and that Nora was to be informed of his whereabouts when she awakened.

"Why can't I stay with her, sir?" Agnes asked.

Horrey paused, then nodded. "I—I'd appreciate it, Sergeant." He corrected himself to say, "Agnes", and then he moved away in embarrassment.

Yaney chuckled. "Tain't fighting that makes the world a raw place," he said. "It's stiff-minded jokers like you, Clem."

The staff meeting was a protracted affair. Horrey expected, and almost hoped, that Yaney would catch it in the neck. But as the officers crowded around the brightly lighted map table and discussed their plans, yaney was treated with a stiff politeness. Occasionally they gave him a suspicious glance, but somehow their eyes always fell quietly back to the board.

It was as though each man longed to pin the guilt on the air officer, yet realized that the guilt was shared. Only the minority of two prodded him with veiled hints.

Horrey wanted to speak. He wanted to say, "Yaney stood here and told us one thing while he really believed something else." But he never said it. Yaney would have replied, "You asked for facts, not opinions. You formed your own opinions from the facts of the Amur."

And Yaney was right. He could have suppressed the information about the mines, and gone ahead with the bombing, not even consulting the staff, pretending ignorance. Instead, he had come to his superiors like a soldier. The trouble with Yaney: he would recognize no political authority above the military.

Twice Horrey noticed the commanding general peering at Yaney's blandly innocent face while someone else was speaking, and twice he thought he detected a glimmer of sardonic amusement in the commander's eyes. Was it as Yaney claimed then—that each man among them, except Horrey, had realized that he had been voting for war or peace? Horrey scorned himself for not thinking the matter out more clearly. He had been on edge, but there was no excuse.

Once a distant explosion quivered the room, and the commander stepped hastily to the phone. "An explosion at the pumping station, gentlemen," he said upon returning. "Clearly sabotage."

The wave of local troubles had begun.

The group broke up after midnight. Yaney's plan for an immediate, across-the-board air-strike had

been approved after only brief meditation. Plans that had been prepared for months were removed from their safes, studied, and amended. A few immediate instructions were sent to field commanders. Yaney sent a two-word message to his command "Happy Epoch, Gentlemen"—and they would understand.

Horrey went home to his wife at one. He wore his .45 and he cut the flap from the holster. The streets were dark. The streets were full of hate. There was fear in the streets. Henceforth the blackout would be permanently in force.

There was no trouble at his house. Now the world had larger worries than a general who fired his servant. He tiptoed through the darkened parlor, for Agnes was sleeping on the sofa. The bedroom light was on. He paused in the doorway. Nora had arisen, but she was asleep again—stretched out across the bed in a negligee. Tomorrow he would try to arrange passage for her—back to the States. Tokyo was no place for Nora with a full-scale war under way. Or did it matter? The States wouldn't be much safer. Still, he would send her back.

A light flickered on in the parlor, and he went back to see the WAC rubbing sleep from her eyes. She sat on the sofa with her bare feet curled beneath her. For the first time, Horrey noticed that he had a very beautiful secretary. He was glad she smiled at him, even though the smile was formal. He was glad she didn't come to an uneasy attention when he entered.

"I'm sorry Yaney was such a pest," he said softly, and took a chair across the room.

She pressed her hands against her folded shins and stared down at them. The light from the lamp caught in her hair, darkening the shadows on her face. "He wasn't exactly a pest, sir," she said slowly. "It's just—that I don't understand him, I guess. He frightens me."

The general nodded. Men like Yaney always frightened their women, he thought. But their women loved them for it. He could see that the dynamic air officer had done something to this girl's mind and heart; and she was baffled by it. Yaney was a rare bird—a fighter to the core—and the world was suspicious of its rare birds. Once fighters had been common, before men tried to be turnips.

Again he was displeased with Yaney's homily.

"Well, Agnes, I guess you'll have a new boss before too long."

She looked up, frowning. "I don't understand, sir."

"I'm going to the mainland, if I can swing it. And I think I can."

"You want to go."

He nodded, looking aside. "I bungled things up. I cast my advice for Yaney's plan. I was too stupid to even see this afternoon's consequences."

Agnes cleared her throat and looked uneasy. A general scolding himself before a sergeant was a new phenomenon. Still, she had the courage to say, "I'm sure you did what you thought was best, sir."

"No, but I—" He stopped. A feeling of uneasiness came over him. "Do you suppose people have convictions of which they aren't even aware? Underlying beliefs that con-

tradict the ones they think they believe?"

"You mean like instincts, sir?"

He scarcely heard her. "Maybe—I—did do what I thought was best." Suddenly he shot her a quizzical glance. "Agnes—"

"Yes sir?"

"How would you like to be a turnip?"

She giggled, then frowned peculiarly without erasing the grin. "What a horrible idea!" She cocked her head.

Something in Horrey seemed to come alive. "Tell me, when you were a child, did you ever wish you were something else? A dog maybe, a fish, a butterfly?"

She grinned and blushed. "Sure. I used to wish I was a cat—with long claws, to scratch my big brother."

The general chuckled happily. "But never a turnip?"

"Never a turnip."

"I used to wish I was a chicken-hawk," he confided. "Used to watch them swoop down in the fields, and watch the old hens hide in the brush and cluck."

They shared a moment of solemn silence.

"Yaney's the chicken—hawk, though," he murmured. Then he stood up. "Better get some sleep, child. I'll take you to the spare bedroom. It's not safe to go out. . . ." He paused.

A siren had begun to wail in the distance. Another sprang up to accompany it. While they listened, the city became alive with sound. Small whistles, deep-throated pipes, spinning discs that shrieked—all wailing, all warning—"Let us be afraid together."

The M.P. on the porch needlessly

called through the front door. "Air warning, sir!"

"On second thought," said Horrey, "I'll show you the way to the basement. There's a shelter down there. I'll have to wake Nora, I guess." Then he heard her coming down the hall, and in a moment she stood in the doorway, staring about in fright. Her hands were over her ears, screening out the screech of the city.

"What is it, Clement?" She was trembling from head to toe.

Somehow, her terrified appearance saddened him. A child that wanted security. "Oh, probably a Manchurian plane or two," he told her casually, knowing it was a lie. "Nothing to worry about. Might be only a practice warning. If you don't like it, maybe you'd better go down to the basement."

"You come too!" she cried as she hurried away.

He whispered to Agnes, "Go with her. I'll hang around awhile to let her think there's nothing to worry about."

Agnes nodded and moved away. The quickness of her stop spoke of excitement. Strange! She had never felt the teeth of danger, but now there was cause for fear, and she surely saw it. Was not inexperience the catalyst of fear? But the cloak of anticipation had fallen about her, the masking-mantle of a quiet eagerness. Was Yaney right? Beneath the embroidered costume of polite culture, did the heart scorn peace?

He doused the parlor light, and became aware of the bed-lamp's gleam on the floor of the hallway. A river of yellow light, calling him. They were no doubt waiting. He turned toward

the basement, then paused a moment, thinking.

He had fired Yoshigura, and men had died. Because they died, others were angry. And the anger would sweep the scythe of further death. Anger was resonant, oscillating in the tuned circuit of the social heart long after the initiating pulse had faded. By now they had forgotten Yoshigura, but the echoes of anger would grow.

He had listened to Yancy, called for bombing of the Amur. And war came. And millions would die. What did it matter? Man, only a microcosm.

Or a necrocosm?

He sighed and turn away from the basement. He, Horrey, did have a responsibility for tomorrow, one that belonged to him alone. The responsibility was not the fighter's, not Yancy's, for Yancy could never feel it. He moved toward the bedroom light. The room was warm—warm with the smell of a slow-minded woman whom he loved. Her powder, her creams, her perspiration on the pillow—odors—and the odor of fright.

He stepped toward the lamp, but the voice stopped him: "You have finally come."

They had infiltrated the radio in darkness while Nora had been asleep earlier in the evening. He stared at it calmly.

"You did not obey."

He folded his arms and stood glowing. "I obeyed the weight of my thoughts," he growled. "How can tomorrow rule its past?"

They were silent awhile, and he wondered if they were prepared to take revenge. The sound of heavy artillery was booming from the outskirts of the city. A familiar sound

—almost comforting. Occasionally the speaker croaked static, as if clearing its throat.

Again it spoke, now wearily: "You helped make your tomorrow. Now live in it. We go."

"Who are you?"

"We revealed our name. It is enough. You could not understand."

The static faded.

"Wait!" he snapped. "Where are you going?"

"Further back," said the tired voice. "We will try further back, to change the scheme."

"To change yesterday?"

"Yes."

"You have no right!"

A pause, while artillery spoke its gloomy poem in the distance.

"You like your world, Man?"

He straightened proudly. "Men have built it. They dragged their fingers in the earth and lifted up towers of steel, instruments of fury."

It was his world, he thought, and he loved it—if for no other reason than that Man had made it. Man was a king, a small king to be sure, but Horrey believed in Man's right to rule as he saw fit—be it for good or evil. And the creature from tomorrow wanted to change the yesterdays of ten thousand years, to erase the history that had fashioned today. How could he stop them?

The new ceiling fixture? It was there. And the being's name—the words of the electrician . . .

"Your name—that number—what does it mean?" he asked.

The voice was hesitant. "Our matter is your energy. Our energy is your matter. Our universes are related by tensor transformation equations. A wavelength in your system corres-

ponds to a spatial relationship in ours. Our name is our position in space."

Horrey shook his head in mystification. "I can't understand. I thought you were out of tomorrow."

Another pause. "Our world grows out of yours, lies parallel with your tomorrow. We are a part of your five-space tomorrow."

Again Horrey shook his head.

"You have destroyed us." There was a note of anger in the voice now. "Your releases of energy correspond to the appearance of mass in our world-space. We must change your yesterday. Perhaps we shall have to destroy you."

He said nothing.

"Will you remove the light?" they asked. "Or must we force it off again?"

Without hesitation he tugged the chain and plunged the room in blackness.

"If you return the light, we shall afflict you."

The radio clicked off. The little creeps began goose-stepping up the wall again. He watched silently as they came, wave upon wave, like grimy cursing G.I.s flooding over the neutral, pock-marked ground toward the enemy. Running low, crouching over their rifles, bayonets gleaming dully in the dawn. He could not escape the conviction that they were somehow related to human life. They were not little worms, inching their way toward the moulding; of that he was certain. Their appearance in his world could have only a vague mathematical relationship to their appearance in their own world.

But what lay behind the strange and glowing phenomenon.

He let them get clear of the set.

Their phosphorescence made concentric patterns on the wall. The pattern moved as a unit, pulsating with each jerky lurch ahead. He waited until their journey was half completed.

Then he took the calculated risk and pulled the light-cord.

Faint violet suffused the ceiling. The beings stopped. They flattened against the wall as if ironed down by an unseen hand. They glowed more brightly, seemed to swell a little.

"Now change yesterday!" he snarled, backing away.

The glow slowly became a glare, and the room was flooded with the weird light. They were growing larger, flooding together as they absorbed the fleeting quanta.

Our matter is your energy, he remembered. He was bombarding them with their own substance! He backed against the door and suppressed the desire to run. "It's my show," he told himself grimly, "and I'll see it through."

They were no longer differentiated as to units, but had become a single patch of writhing radiation that seemed detached from the wall. It was trying to approach him! And he felt an aura of rage about it. He realized suddenly that he was holding his gun in a trembling fist, while his teeth ground together in expectancy of battle.

Suddenly the process reached saturation.

A high-pitched hum struck him like a blast of supersonic noise from the dive of a high-mach jet-craft. It drove him to his knees, and the gun clattered to the floor. His vision dimmed for a moment.

The humming waned. When he

looked again, the breath caught in his throat. The tortured patch of light was gone. In its place was a gaping maw of blackness in which two worlds were fused. Beyond it lay—the world of the little creeps. He was staring into a laboratory. And the beings were watching him, the quietly frantic faces.

"Thought is a form of energy!" he gasped in sudden understanding.

They said nothing, but the leprous faces watched him in terrible accusation. In the center of the lab was a fat metal box from which a coaxial cable ran ceilingward. It too seemed to be watching, from a pair of thick lenses in its face. Behind the lenses, lights were glowing, and Horrey associated it with a projector. Suddenly it spoke.

"My energy is being duplicated from beyond the transform-region. HELP ME. My energy is being duplicated from . . ."

It was a complaint, and the leprous faces turned to stare at it dully for a moment.

"Be silent!" said a voice.

The machine continued its complaint. A man stepped forward and jabbed at a button. The button was labelled "PAIN". The machine shrieked its high-pitched whine, then fell to crying softly.

"Now be silent," growled the voice again.

Horrey fumbled for the doorknob as he staggered to his feet.

"Do not attempt to escape," growled the voice. "We can kill you."

Horrey turned. His face was white and he was panting softly as he searched the group with his eyes, looking for the speaker.

The speaker was an old man, rag-

ged and scrawny as were the others. Horrey stared at his face for a long time, then: "I know you," he said quietly.

The old man said nothing, but there was hate in his eyes, and shame.

The machine, no longer crying, spoke again: *"He cannot help what he is. He is a creature of thought energy from your place in the time plane."*

"Be silent!" shrieked the old man in fury. "It is not so!"

Horrey's fascination was overpowering his fear.

"You are tomorrow's Yaney," he breathed, staring at the face grown seamy with wrinkles, wizened with self-loathing, twisted with fear.

"No! I am not!" the old one protested wildly.

"You are tomorrow's Yaney. But why have you come back to plague me? Why not plague yourself—the you of your younger days?"

"I am related to Yaney only by tensor transformation!" screamed the old man.

"I'll tell you why you wouldn't haunt yourself!" Horrey bellowed.

"Old man Yaney knows young man Yaney won't listen! Not even if he knows the truth!—the truth about the tomorrows he's helping to make."

The old one clapped his hands to his face. "Kill him!" he groaned.

"Kill him quickly."

"If I kill him," said the machine, "his counterpart in our world shall also die."

"Kill him!"

"No!"

The old man howled a curse and flung himself at the machine, groping again for the pain-button. Sensing

danger, Horrey ducked low and scooped up the gun. He took quick aim, with a steadiness born of desperation.

The gun barked. The old man stiffened, staggered back, clutching at a red blotch on his torn jacket.

There was a scream, but not from the old man. *It came from Horrey's basement!*

Then the gaunt old man was a crumpled heap on the floor.

"*It is hopeless,*" said the machine, "*attempting to change yesterday.*"

The others were staring dumbly at the fallen old one. Horrey aimed at a lense of the machine.

Then, before he fired, it came—a violet light, flooding through the windows of the bedroom. It grew, and grew, until it surpassed the sun in its brilliance.

"*Hell Bomb!*"

Horrey threw himself to the floor and covered his eyes against the blaze of light. There was no sound. Even the bark of ack-ack had stopped as the gunners sought refuge. Horrey's skin felt as if the dry blue-flame of a blow-torch were hovering an inch away. The light penetrated the flesh of his hands and the membrane of his lids to fashion a dull red glow. Somewhere someone was screaming.

He counted thirty seconds, and opened his eyes. The maw of blackness between the world-spaces was still there, but beyond it lay only dust—thick dust, coagulating out of nothingness, growing thicker. From whence did it come?

Your energy is our mass . . . the Hell Bomb.

Then the power failed, and the ceiling light fluttered out. With it went the two-world space, vanished with only a pulse of high sound.

Horrey lay waiting for the shock-wave that would follow the explosion. It came as a roar that seemed to vibrate him up from the floor. Powdered glass sprayed over him from the window, and somewhere there was a sound of splintering wood. A section of the roof was buckling.

Then it was over, and he picked himself up wearily, bleeding from a hundred tiny cuts. Outside of the house, a voice was shouting that the bomb had destroyed the far end of the city.

The general picked a sliver of glass out of his face and staggered toward the basement stairway. Nora would be out like a turnip.

But there were already footsteps on the stairs. It was the WAC.

"Nora—is she—?"

"All right, but scared," the girl panted. "It's Yaney — something wrong."

"Not dead—?"

She shook her head. Horrey slowly descended the dark stairway. They had lighted a candle. By its light he saw Nora sitting on the floor with her face huddled in her hands.

And then he saw Yaney. The fighter was standing like a statue in the center of the stone floor, his eyes glazed with a schizophrenic dullness, his face was empty as the orb of the moon. Horrey approached him slowly.

"Yaney—snap out of it!"

The man's lips moved. A sound followed—like the wail of an infant.

Horrey stared at him quietly for a long time. Then he turned away. The man would have to be committed to an asylum. His mind was gone.

There would be a lot like him, the general thought. As the bombs exploded, and the creatures of the psy-

(Continued on page 138)

"Gothic" is a term too loosely used nowadays. If a story is wound around an old castle and has a goodly dollop of "heaving breasts" and an aura of ersatz horror it's automatically said to be in the "grand tradition." But castles and terror and fainting females aren't enough, for "Gothic" implies something more—a style of writing, a way of looking at things, a sense of "innocent horror." This classic tale of "vampirism" has all of these ingredients along with a villain (Victor De Lyle) who is as much an innocent victim of Dr. Immortelle as any of the children who they prey upon!



Dr. Immortelle

By Kathleen Ludwick

Illustrated by MOREY

I HAVE to smile when I hear all this talk about rejuvenation, after the story Victor de Lyle told me, lying white and still on his cot in the hospital overlooking the ocean, the changing expression of his great dark eyes, the only sign of life about him. Dr. Immortelle beat them to it by about a hundred and fifty years. Strange that his theory has never occurred to any of our modern Occidental practitioners, at least not until very recently. I saw an item in the papers the other day that caused me to suspect that a European scientist had either discovered the secret for himself or perhaps gained his inspiration from the writing of the ancient alchemists, where no doubt Immortelle gained his.

I do not doubt that Methuselah lived a thousand years; I do not doubt that, barring accident, it is possible for men to live *ten thousand* years, if they so desire, or that men have done so and will do so again. Perhaps in time, longevity like that will become so universal as to be taken for granted. The process of rejuvenation will become as common as that of vaccination or the injection of the various serums and anti-toxins that are now the fad of the hour. It may even become compulsory by due process of law! It will follow naturally that the Mrs. Sangsters (sic) of that day will be heard with respect and no doubt Malthus will have many statues erected to his memory.

Why shouldn't we be rejuvenated? Most of us have attained to but the vaguest conception of the meaning of life when "the black camel kneels before the gate." We hear a great deal about infant mortality, and it is indeed a pitiful thing; but the

mortality of the mentally immature is also appalling and infinitely more tragic. But — goat's glands! The thought gives one a feeling of nausea. I wonder if the results of that same operation in olden times, as the historians say, "shrouded by the mists of antiquity," do not form some basis for the legends of fauns and satyrs, those strange beings, half man and half goat, which figure so largely in Grecian and Latin mythology; and if, perhaps, the increasing number of such monsters did not result in the discontinuance of the operation? How shocking to become the parent of such a being! Thank heaven, there is another and better way! At least it will be better if there is wide and general knowledge concerning it for the protection of humanity. To the dissemination of such knowledge I now devote the last days of my life. For myself I do not desire longevity. Such a desire died in me when a Red Cross tent was bombed on the French frontier. Perhaps it was for this that I came, alive, out of the hell of the Argonne!

I have none of the arts of the professional writer. I know nothing of the rules of short-story writing. I am just a plain mining engineer of mediocre ability, wielding a geological pick and hammer more easily than a pen and more familiar with mortars than metaphors. I could run a tunnel to tap a ledge in a porphyry dike easier than I could tell this strange tale. I know more about secondary enrichments than I do of the terminology and equipment of modern surgery, but if the layman can grasp my meaning, I shall be well content. Often, strangely enough, it would seem, it is the man in the street who anticipates the most astounding scientific discov-

eries and grasps their tremendous significance to humanity before his apparent intellectual superiors. I realize that, as Walt Whitman said of his poems, "It will do good — it may do much evil also." But I have faith to believe that the good will far outweigh the evil.

I started for San Francisco one May evening from my parents' home in the Santa Cruz Mountains. It was a moonlit night, and there was little traffic on the highway. The air was soft and mild and fragrant with the scent of innumerable flowers in the gardens of the homes that line the highway down the Peninsula for half-a-hundred miles. Even the humblest home in this favored region may possess the never-ending joy of flowers the year around, if nothing more than the humble petunia and the cheerful scarlet geranium. Where on the face of the globe, except on the shores of the Mediterranean, is there another section so favored by nature as that to which the inhabitants of the region bordering on San Francisco Bay all proudly refer to as "The Peninsula"? It is the Mecca of the whole Pacific Coast. From the north they "go down to the Bay to get warm;" from the sunny San Joaquin, and further south, they stream up to the Bay "to cool off!"

Eastward towered the dark bulk of Mount Diablo. To my right the waters of the lower bay flashed in the moonlight. On my left rose green, gently sloping hills, with their wealth of native shrubs and trees and their plantations of eucalyptus, reminding me always of those words of Howells':

"The inscrutable sadness of the mute races of trees."

I passed Palo Alto with its picturesque university buildings, silent witness to the good that the tragedy of one life may bring to countless multitudes; the salt heaps of Leslie shone white as snow in the moonlight as I passed. It pleased me to speculate on the appearance of the section I was traversing, when it should have been settled as long as London or Paris or Naples has been.

And so I neared the twin cities of San Mateo and Burlingame, the latter with its picturesque little railroad station. A couple of miles south of San Mateo I almost ran over a woman carrying a suitcase. I stopped and offered her a ride. Imagine my astonishment when I found it was Linnie Chaumelle. I had known her as a child in Idaho and she had grown into the loveliest woman I have ever seen. I had long ago lost all track of the Chaumelles, but a few months previously had chanced to meet Linnie at the bedside of a friend in a local hospital, where she was on duty as a special nurse, and we had renewed our acquaintance.

It was the death of Linnie's little brother, Vernon, that precipitated the exposure of that strange and sinister being, Albert Immortelle, and his assistant, Victor de Lyle, and caused them to flee from the Wood River Valley "between two days." Immortelle asserted that the child had cut himself and he had dressed the wound. Linnie's uncle, an eastern surgeon of some note, arrived unexpectedly for a visit about that time. An infection developed and the child died. The child's uncle openly charged that the wound had been made by a surgeon, and that Immortelle had been performing an experiment of some sort. The Chau-

nelles were amongst the oldest residents of that section and highly respected. Feeling ran high and threats of lynching were openly uttered. Immortelle and his assistant owned one of the first automobiles in that section. They fled in the night, and in spite of the attention excited by the appearance of autos at that time, nothing was ever heard of them again until they reappeared many years later in San Francisco.

The strangest feature of it was that my own father stoutly affirmed that he had known Dr. Immortelle some forty years before and he had appeared 'no older at the time he left Wood River Valley. Dr. Immortelle insisted that he was the son of the physician my father had known, but father was positive in his identification. And to complicate matters still further, my grandfather declared that *he* had known this same Immortelle *sixty* years before! That he recognized him because of a peculiar triangular scar above one eyebrow. Dr. Immortelle asserted that this scar was a family mark — a matter of heredity; but my grandfather had served in the Civil War and knew something about wounds himself. He laughed at the idea that the scar was a hereditary mark. As he said it, it was very unlikely that a grandfather and son and grandson should have been wounded in such a manner as to result in the same identical sort of scar in the same location. Moreover, the same explanation could not apply to Victor de Lyle. Both my grandfather and my father were willing to swear to his identity, so he could not be explained away so easily. The people of the camp were frankly puzzled. Both my grandfather and my father

were men of unquestioned veracity, whose sanity had never been doubted; hardheaded business men of good judgment and common sense. There was some mystery here. For those still living, it will be solved if they chance to read this narrative.

No words of mine could convey a just impression of Linnie's beauty and womanly grace; She was the ideal nurse, with the physique and vitality that every nurse should possess; and besides, she possessed that dignity and nobility of character in which many nurses are sadly lacking. To meet her in such a place, at such an hour, staggering under the weight of a heavy suitcase, and in what I might almost call a disheveled condition, was inexpressibly shocking to me. She was a woman of very even temperament, but she appeared to be labouring under considerable excitement. She asked me to drive her to her apartment in the city: but after hearing a part of her story I turned the car and drove back down the Peninsula—past Los Gatos and through the canyon, to the ranch of my parents in the Santa Cruz Hills. Linnie's mother and mine had been friends in those long-past Idaho days and I knew my mother would give her the care she needed. I left her there and returned to the city.

The afternoon papers were filled with the details of the latest accident in El Diablo Canyon. Dr. Immortelle, a well-known local physician, and his associate, Victor de Lyle, had been conducting a sort of orphanage or sanitarium at Crescent Beach. Starting for the city at night, they had gone over the bank, into the canyon, hundreds of feet below. The accident had apparently been caused by their

swerving the car to avoid running over the body of a tramp that some other car had struck and killed. Dr. Immortelle had been killed instantly and shockingly mangled, and Victor de Lyle had been fatally injured.

One of the puzzling features of the accident had been the presence of a woman's footprints near the scene of the tragedy; also the appearance of a young and beautiful woman at a little station down the Peninsula, who had appeared greatly agitated at missing the last local to the city and had started out afoot, carrying a heavy suitcase, apparently with the intention of walking to the next station two or three miles away, to catch the inter-urban car whose terminus was at that point. The theory was advanced that the footprints had been made by a woman occupant of the car that had struck the tramp; that, getting out of the machine, she had found the tramp to be fatally injured, and because of this and possibly other compromising circumstances, she had feared to inform the authorities. The mystery was never solved to the satisfaction of the police and detectives. Only one person besides myself and parents, and the actual actors in the tragedy, ever knew who made those footprints. That was my wife. Linnie made them—Linnie, my other self, who sleeps in a little French cemetery near where the Germans bombed the Red Cross tent where she tended the wounded and dying. I promised Victor de Lyle that I would write this story as best I could, but it would not have been given to the world in her lifetime had my wife lived. I am giving it to the world now because the time for my own passing draws near and I believe the world is ready for the wide

and practical application of Dr. Immortelle's method of rejuvenation.

I went to see Victor de Lyle as soon as the physicians would allow me to do so. There were certain features of Linnie's story that I desired to have corroborated. Bit by bit, at the cost of the most excruciating agony, the recital spread over many days, he told me the most amazing story I have ever heard. There have been times since when I have wondered if I weren't as locoed as any Idaho steer that has been browsing on rattleweed: and then I remembered finding Linnie on the highway, and what my father and grandfather said about having known Immortelle so many years before, and thereby regain faith in my own sanity.

As a child I had always feared Dr. Immortelle, the sinister-looking older man with the dark, compelling eyes, despite his efforts to win my favor: but I had always liked his young assistant, De Lyle, with the ready, sympathetic smile and gentle manners and the kind brown eyes whose expression hinted of sorrow and tragedy. I wrote down his story as he related it to me day by day. Later I read it to him and he pronounced the most vital portions correct in every detail. Since then I have consulted various authorities, talked with physicians and surgeons of international reputation, and I am assured there is no serious technical error in the tale.

I can differentiate between lancet and scapula, bistoury and canula; I can even discuss the merits of the Aveling syringe as compared with the Collins apparatus or Spencer's instrument with the canula that can be plunged directly into the blood-vessel. Also, I have

opinions as to the merits of arterial as opposed to intravenous transfusion: but I had hard work learning to twist my tongue around such terms as phlebotomy, arteriovenous anastomosis, embolism and thrombosis: and it was a long time before I got hep to the difference between Crile's tube and Payre's tube and Brewster's tube of German silver.

"I was born a slave on a plantation in North Carolina in the year 1745. No, *not* 1845. I was born a mulatto. Perhaps you think my mind is affected — but wait till I have finished! My father was a white oversser and my mother a negress from the Guinea Coast. I am not delirious — I am not insane — although I realize that it must be difficult for you to credit my statements." Incredulously I noted his soft, waving brown hair, his hazel eyes, his skin that in health had been fairer than my own suntanned hide. "You will believe me before my story is ended," he said sardonically. I did.

"My old master was of French ancestry. Huguenot stock. His wife's people were Pennsylvania Dutch — and Quakers. They were in one of the great treks from Pennsylvania to North Carolina. She had not hesitated to marry outside the faith in which she had been reared when she met and fell in love with the elder Immortelle. Perhaps it was from her that Albert inherited that mystical tendency which influenced his life so greatly.

"The elder Immortelle was the proprietor of a large plantation. Naturally, he grew the products peculiar to that region — tobacco, cotton, corn and horses. He had been educated for a physician but he had a passion for stock raising. Being an altruist, his

knowledge of medicine and the crude surgery of the times was of incalculable benefit to the inhabitants of that sparsely settled region, and he gave of his time and services as freely to the most wretched slave as to the haughty proprietor of the most widely-stretching plantation. He possessed one of the finest libraries in America at that time. Among his books were some of the works of the ancient Alchemists. They possessed a strange fascination for his son. The boy would pore over them for hours when other lads of his age were engaged in riding or hunting or other local sports and pleasures usual to youths of their years.

"Second only to his interest in books was the attraction animals possessed for him, especially his father's thoroughbred herd. Even as a child he was always begging for pets. As he grew older, he would ask for them under the condition that they were to be his own exclusive property to do with as he pleased. His father was greatly pleased by the scientific spirit which Albert displayed in the breeding of the stock on the plantation. My master possessed some of the best specimens of horseflesh in that section. He fondly hoped to see his son become one of the most famous stock-breeders of his day. If he had suspected the object which no doubt inspired his son even at an early age, his emotions would have been of a different character.

"Albert turned his earliest attention to the breeding of poultry, cats, dogs, sheep and other comparatively short-lived animals, that he might observe the results of certain experiments on several generations. He was especially impressed with the disastrous results

of inbreeding in relation to fecundity, and this formed the very basis of the theory he was slowly evolving and which was to be fraught with such tragic and momentous results to himself and countless others.

"Like most Southern gentlemen of that period, he was fond of gaming, wine and women: but so great was his self-control that I never knew him to overstep the bounds of sobriety. In gaming and the pursuit of women his methods were cold-bloodedly scientific; but I believe that during his whole lifetime he really loved only one woman.

"He was selfish and cruel, persistent in the pursuit of any object. He was a 'throwback,' a reversion to some strange type that one found it impossible to associate with either parent. His father and mother never understood him. He was an even greater puzzle to me who saw more of him than anyone else did. We were nearly the same age. His father had given me to him for his own personal attendant. It seems strange to you that I was ever a slave, doesn't it? But I assure you that it is true and I am able to verify this statement in every respect. I was his almost constant companion. For hours at a time he would pore over certain problems whose existence I did not at that time suspect. I have known few human beings capable of such intense concentration.

"When we were young lads he said to me once:

"'Victor, when I will move my hand, why is it that my hand responds to my will? It must be for the reason that every smallest particle of that hand has a consciousness of its own!' And this was long before Dalton had ad-

vanced his atomic theory. We had never heard of molecules or atoms, to say nothing of electrons! He had no modern microscope to aid in confirming his theories. No one at that time had ever witnessed the marvelous division of cells, the orderly action of centrosomes and chromosomes with which every student of histology is today acquainted and takes as a matter of course. His error lay in his theory of the manner of reproduction of cells and yet, in spite of this, he and I are, or were, living witnesses to the success of his experimentation.

"He acquired all that the colonies had to offer at that period in the study of medicine and surgery, then pursued his studies in London and Paris and even in other capitals of Europe. I remember once in Vienna—but let that pass! I accompanied him always and for his own purposes he educated me. There never was the same prejudice on the Continent against colored people that has always existed here in America.

"We were in Paris at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. A privateer nearly captured us on our way home. I have often wished that it had sunk us. Albert served through the war and I was with him as his personal attendant. Naturally, we were exposed to great dangers. I feel certain now that he was by nature cowardly, but his scientific bent of mind and the goal he had in view were sufficient to counterbalance his fears. He had the reputation of being one of the most fearless and efficient surgeons in the Continental Army. Strange that a man should so determinedly face death in his efforts to find a preventive of Death itself! How many revolutionary heroes lost their lives as a result of

his experiments I have no means of knowing, but the total was doubtless large. I possessed a considerable knowledge of medicine and surgery, myself, for those times, which was all a part of my master's plans. He took great pains to instruct me in the anatomy of the nerves and blood-vessels.

"At the close of the war we settled in New York. We took a house in a secluded suburban section. Immortelle was then about forty years old and both of us commenced to feel the effects of years of military service with the inescapable hardships which would appear so incredibly severe to modern soldiers. My master's step was not so springy as it had been.

"Never have I seen a human being who dreaded the approach of age as did my master. It was while we were living in the New York house that he first broached the subject that must have been uppermost in his thoughts for years. I was astounded. His plans to make practical application of his theories filled me with horror, hardened to suffering as I had become during the course of the war. I am by nature conservative. Also, I had not the depth of intellect of Albert Immortelle, nor his scientific bent of mind.

Afterwards, I could recall many hints and innuendoes that should have prepared me for his disclosure and I wondered that I had not grasped his purpose sooner. Cleverly he dangled the bait before me.

"Remember," he would say when I wavered, 'only accident can bar us from attaining any age we may desire to reach. We can remain youthful and grow increasingly attractive with the passage of the years, instead of hideously ugly with wrinkled skins and bald heads and the yellow snags of age in our mouths that ever repel

youth and beauty.' (Our dentists at that day were not capable of performing the miracles of artistic dental surgery that we take as a matter of course today.)

"Remember, he was my master — I his slave. Over me he had the power of life and death. Never was such a cunning tempter. He tempted me with the promise of freedom and the hope that through the gradual loss of most of my own blood, covering a long period of time, and the substitution of Caucasian blood through the process of transfusion, I might, to all intents and purposes, become a Caucasian. You cannot understand what that means, you who have not been an object of contempt and disdain through no fault of your own; you who have not been jostled brutally on the sidewalk and kicked off the curb by your actual inferiors, and felt yourself helpless to resent brutality and insult!

"Briefly, this theory was this: That the tiny particles of our bodies which we now call cells, breed and reproduce their kind in a manner somewhat similar to that of most animals; that the inbreeding through countless generations, in the body of a human being which they themselves compose, causes a loss in fecundity just as it does in horses and cattle; causes the cells to degenerate, to 'run out,' as we say of animals and plants; *and that this loss in fecundity is the true cause of old age.* He believed that, as stock men range far afield for new strains to strengthen the breeds of their flocks and herds, so new vigor might be acquired by introducing young and vigorous cells into the blood of the aged. *Necessarily, the cells to be so introduced must be from the vascular system of youth; and even then, I think,*

he glimpsed the truth which science has bit lately demonstrated, that the character of the blood of an individual becomes fixed at the age of three or four years and thereafter remains constant.

"There is no doubt that the ancient Alchemists practiced this method of rejuvenation. Immortelle's error lay in his theory as to the manner of reproduction of the cells, which, instead of breeding with older cells in the veins of the recipient, simply multiplied through division in their new locations crowding out the weaker cells, and went about their tasks of rebuilding the body with new materials and removing the waste products.

"Transfusion is old — how old no man can say. It was probably practiced long before recorded history. A friend of mine who has accompanied several archeological expeditions to the Far East asserts that the Alchemists gained their knowledge from the secret records of a fraternity old before Babylon and Nineveh became but rubbish heaps covered by the shifting desert sands! It is a fact that transfusion was employed in the case of Pope Innocent VII, and there is a tradition to the effect that three young boys perished in the attempt. Perhaps the old legends of vampirism had their origin in such a source.

"Transfusion is a common operation today, but when Albert Immortelle first broached the subject to me, an open announcement of our object would have been regarded with the greatest horror and only too well-founded fear of results would have rendered it impossible for us to secure subjects. Anesthetics had not yet been discovered and aseptic surgery was a hundred years in the future. We had to

devise ways and means of securing subjects.

"It was my young master's plan to found an orphanage, whose most promising inmates he would later use for his transfusion experiments, which heretofore had included animals only. I was to be his first subject after the children; and when I had mastered the details of the process, he himself would submit to the operation. Of course, the danger as well as the suffering was incalculably greater than in these days of anesthetics and aseptic surgery. My master was skilled in the art of hypnotism, or mesmerism, as it was then called, but it often failed. Probably he was the first surgeon to use that strange force for anesthetization. It is a well-known fact that children are less susceptible to it than adults; and our subjects were all children, mostly of tender years — in fact all that *survived* were of such tender age! Tales of children of such age would in any event be treated as due to vivid imaginations. Even to this day I sometimes waken from nightmares with the agonized screams of those little victims ringing in my ears.

"Today there is practically no danger from infection and the danger from clotting is being eliminated through the division of humanity into groups classified according to the constituency of their blood. We had no aspirating syringe to determine the amount of blood taken from the donors and how many little victims lost their lives in this manner, as sacrifices to our rejuvenation, I have no means of knowing. It was, of course, unwise to keep records of such cases. All I know is that there were many fatalities. How we escaped with our own lives is a mystery to me. I am unable

to fathom the inscrutable purpose of Providence in allowing us to cumber this earth for so long a time.

"When my conscience revolted, always before my eyes Immortelle dangled the bait of my own altered personality; for I had emerged, a radiant Caucasian, from my somber and repellent negroid chrysalis. As far as I am personally concerned, from a physical standpoint, I am, or rather was, a living witness to the success of his experiment. Even the most widely experienced ethnologist would hardly suspect me of having one drop of negro blood in my veins. No one who had known me as a kinky-haired mulatto youth, were he in existence still, would ever recognize that colored boy in the cultured, refined Caucasian with the waving brown hair, hazeyes and complexion as fair as your own, with the rosy hue of health in his cheeks. From a selfish and brutal young savage with a violent temper, I had been transformed into an amiable and tractable individual, vastly useful to my master, but more conscientious than was conducive to my peace of mind or his. This was due, I am sure, to Immortelle's deliberate selection of children of most amiable disposition for donors in transfusion operations in which I was the recipient. For himself he always selected fearless and intrepid subjects of indomitable wills. Such wills are often characteristic of amiable children. Stubbornness and strength of will differ from each other as widely as the poles.

"For the sake of greater safety, to be more reasonably certain that the blood of the donor would assimilate with my own, Immortelle always bled me freely before a transfusion. Im-

mortelle deserves credit at least for his scientific accomplishments. Intellectually he was a giant amongst the men of his time. When he commenced his experiments he had no safe and sure scientific ground beneath his feet. He was treading the insecure and shifting sands of conjecture.

"Always he emphasized the ultimate benefit to humanity of our experiments; but for many a long and lonely year I realized that his own chief object was to live as long as possible, in order to gratify his sensual appetites, however Epicurean they might have been termed, to the limit of danger to his hold on life.

"Every man with a drop of blood in his veins has a passionate desire for offspring. Several times I contemplated marriage, but Albert always discouraged me.

"He argued that if we married and had families, we must either witness the passing from life of our wives and offspring, or witness their endurance of the sufferings and dangers of transfusion. We knew nothing of aseptic surgery, but I believe my master grasped the principles of it before we commenced our experiments, for he always used bottled water and the scorched linen dressings that so many regarded merely as a superstition of old midwives.

"There was always the danger of thrombosis due to the admixture of certain bloods which refused to assimilate. Immortelle argued with good grounds for his conviction, that it would be impossible to rejuvenate our wives and offspring even to the second generation, without knowledge of our methods becoming known. Someone amongst such a large group would inevitable give the secret away. Also

when a hue and cry were raised, as was bound to be the case sooner or later, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to escape from popular wrath with a large number of relatives and dependents. It had been difficult enough on several occasions for our two selves. So reluctantly I relinquished my dream of conjugal felicity — the tender joys of one's own fireside, for the Dead Sea fruit of immortality in the flesh. I realized my error many long years ago: for I have come to know that immortality for the individual isolated from his kind could not atone for the loss of the happiness conferred by a perfect and harmonious union and the sweet delights afforded by the companionship of one's own offspring.

"Of course it was impossible to conduct an orphanage without attendants, and more especially female attendants. Ours were chiefly young women who had been saved by Immortelle and myself. They were obviously curious when assisting at transfusion operations, but their curiosity was never satisfied. The trained nurse had not as yet been evolved when we commenced our experiments in rejuvenation.

"Naturally all our philanthropic efforts to save the reputations of the erring were not successful. Usually they covered their tracks in coming to us and always bore an assumed name. When they departed, only Immortelle and I knew how, or when, or what their destination was. We had many aliases, he and I, but used our own names most frequently. It was embarrassing to meet people one had perhaps known forty years before. In such cases, he often passed for a son of himself, as in Idaho, where, how-

ever, he failed to deceive your father.

"In spite of all, suspicion would fasten on us. Rumors would spread connecting us with various mysterious disappearances. We found it expedient to leave our New York address on one occasion, more hastily than was convenient. So it was with our Philadelphia orphanage and others we established in this country. It was the same with those we established in London, and in Paris and other Continental cities. In some locations we spent as long a period as ten years. In others no sooner were we established than some catastrophe would occur, which would soil all our plans and send us scurrying into hiding. This was the case when we were compelled to depart so hastily from that quiet and comparatively isolated valley in Idaho, where you and I first met—you a child and I to all appearances a young and inexperienced physician, but in reality an old and saddened man with experience of agonies unparalleled by any other person save my master, Immortelle! On him they had apparently no effect.

"In that little Idaho mining camp everything seemed favorable to our plans. It was a small camp and yet not small enough to allow each resident to become extremely familiar with the private affairs of all the rest. There was a considerable floating population, as in all mining camps, which was an advantage from our point of view.

"The absolute privacy essential to the successful prosecution of our plans was possible in the house we chose amongst the magnificent old cottonwoods of the river bottom and from which that beautiful but brawling stream derives its name. Earth does

not hold a more picturesque spot than that narrow valley walled in by the precipitous mountains of the Sawtooth range. Often I close my eyes to see quite vividly again those miles on miles of cottonwoods. I recall the contrast of their orange hues in autumn with the dark green of the hardy firs that venture bravely down into the valley so far from most of their kind, and I see the thousands of ears of flame-colored chokecherry brush. And in the early summer, who that has ever seen them can forget those acres upon acres of blue forget-me-nots? In that valley they seem to disregard their naturally retiring habits that leads them to choose their abodes in the shelter of trees and shrubs. Away from all shelter, they boldly advance into the valley and flaunt their vivid hues under the bluer skies of Idaho!

"Our house, as you remember, was an old, flimsy, unpainted weatherbeaten structure, but easily and cheaply remodeled for our purpose, ostensibly that of residence and laboratory. Immortelle was supposed to be deeply interested in the study of chemistry. Naturally, in such a climate, where the cold is so intense for a long period of each year, deep cellars are indispensable. We constructed a large one, also an underground laboratory with double skylight and heavy shutters which would prevent freezing of our chemicals and also serve to muffle any undesirable sounds and odors.

"The river bottom consisted chiefly of gravel in which a small grave might easily and rapidly be dug at dead of night, if necessary. Also, the cottonwoods and thickets of wild roses, chokecherries and other shrubs hung

with the creepers of the wild clematis, screened us in summer from inquisitive eyes and permitted easy access to a certain disreputable quarter of the camp. It was always possible in case of urgent necessity to secure assistance from this quarter, for there are always some nurses amongst those unfortunates. Dr. Immortelle never passed up anything. In return for his professional services he was usually able to obtain assistance that was almost as invaluable as his own. We were acquainted with the details of many a tragedy hidden from the knowledge of the general public. As you may know, it was the discovery by two little girls of the grave of a newborn infant, richly clad, in the gravel of the river bottom, together with the death of little Vernon Chaumelle, that precipitated our flight.

"There never was any necessity, from a financial standpoint, for Dr. Immortelle or myself to practice our professions. The proceeds from the sale of his father's plantation, to which he was the only heir, had been invested in Manhattan real estate nearly a hundred years before, as well as my own salary after the Emancipation Proclamation. The doctor's profession was only a blind, only a cloak for our real and sinister purposes.

"A considerable space of time is naturally required to establish a physician in a new location. Immortelle usually employed some length of time in judiciously cultivating the acquaintance of the local 'four hundred,' many of whom, sooner or later, he was absolutely certain, would require his professional services. It fell to my lot to make the acquaintance of the oldest inhabitants and, through them, to

familiarize myself with the history of the best of families, chiefly in regard to heredity, persistently recurring physical characteristics and freedom from blood taint of a certain character.

"The densely wooded river bottom furnished an ideal playground for the children of the camp. There were long stretches of clean white sand and gravel to play in; Indian paint brush to suck honey from; thickets of wild roses, willow clumps for shade with violets hidden in the lush grass of their shady recesses, coral flowers and fragrant red mallow. An ideal spot also for two human vampires to find a childish victim!

"Not being on the main line of the railroad, that section was rarely visited by tramps at that time, although at long intervals they used the willows for a camping ground. Down there in the willows we assiduously cultivated the friendship of the little ones through stories we told them, and the judicious gifts of sweets. We finally decided upon a donor for the next transfusion operation in which Immortelle was to be the recipient. Carefully we spun the threads of our web.

"The Chaumelles were amongst the oldest and most respected residents of that section. There was no blood taint in the family. They had been clean living and high thinking people for generations. One of the children, Vernon, met all but one of the doctor's requirements. He possessed no trace of cruelty, and he was a hundred per cent perfect from a physical standpoint. He was courageous, strong-willed, but not stubborn, and of more than average mentality. He was then scarcely five years old and Linnie, his little sister and constant companion, was a little over three.

They often came to play in the willows with older children. One day they ran away by themselves from their home at the opposite edge of town. They were playing in the grove near our house when Vernon fell and hurt his arm. It was a mere scratch and really needed no attention. By dint of a little candy and considerable persuasion, we succeeded in getting them inside the house, little golden-haired Linnie, with the wide, wondering blue eyes, and drake-eyed, sturdy little Vernon.

"Linnie was left in our living-room, while Immortelle *extracted the splinter* from her little brother's arm. A box of chocolates and some wondrously illustrated story books, purchased purposely for such occasions, occupied her attention for awhile; but tiring of them, she found her way unexpectedly, through a door carelessly left unlocked, to our subterranean operating room. I have never been able to forget the expression of her great blue eyes when she saw me in my white smock and cap, surrounded by the implements of my murderous occupation, and her little brother strapped securely to one table under the influence of the imperfect anesthetic, his pale face becoming ever paler as the life stream flowed from his little artery through the glass tube into the vein of the sinister-looking man reclining on the other table beside the child's couch. We were not yet using an aspirating syringe, which would allow us to measure the quantity of blood lost by the donor, and were alarmed by the pallor and weakness of the little boy. Even the two hardened creatures who assisted at the operation seemed frightened and conscience-stricken.

"I carried Vernon home, his little pale face resting on my shoulder. I

had concocted some plausible tale to account for the prolonged absence of the children. The whole camp had been searching for them. I told a story of a fall and a wound caused by a piece of tin from an old can left by some hoboes at their camp, and a serious loss of blood. I promised to call next day and dress the wound in case it seemed inexpedient to take Vernon to the office. Dr. Immortelle was indisposed, having injured himself with a lancet in dressing Vernon's wound. What a hypocrite I felt; how vile I knew myself to be, when they thanked me so profusely for my *kindness!*

"You know what happens sometimes to the best laid plans of mice and men. Perhaps you recall the incident that led to our undoing; how Vernon's uncle, an eastern surgeon of some note, arrived unexpectedly on a visit and himself dressed the wound; how his suspicions were aroused. You remember how an infection developed and the child died, and how almost simultaneously the grave of a newborn infant was discovered in suspiciously close proximity to our 'laboratory.' Perhaps you can recall the investigation that followed. You may remember that a sort of catacombs was later discovered connecting with our operating-room, several bricked-up niches and their gruesome contents; but before that we were well on our way to safety. We owned one of the first automobiles in that part of the country.

"Your father declared that he had known Immortelle *himself* forty years before in the East, and not the latter's *father*, as Immortelle had always insisted; and to cap the climax, your grandfather solemnly averred that *he* had known this same Immortelle *sixty*

years before, and that at the time he appeared in Wood River Valley, he appeared no older than at the time your grandfather had known him in his youth! One factor in his recognition and his positive identification consisted of a peculiar triangular scar over the left eyebrow. Had it been a birthmark it might have appeared for several generations; but it was improbable that three generations would meet with an accident resulting in the same identically shaped scar in the very same location. Some who had known your father and grandfather well for many years were frankly puzzled. They knew them for men whose reputation for truth and veracity had never been questioned. Others were greatly amused and openly accused them of being the victims of hallucinations. They made sarcastic references to the Wandering Jew, to St. Germaine, to Lord Lytton's well-known hero, Zannoni, and that lesser-known but no less remarkable character of fiction, Melmoth the Wanderer.

"After some years we returned to San Francisco. Both of us were younger in appearance than when we fled from Idaho. Also, there were several little graves in the Argentine, whose occupants, if they could have spoken, might have thrown considerable light on the source of our youthful appearance and whose piteous tales would have wrung the hearts of humanity and brought down swift and terrible retribution on the vampires who had waxed young and strong on their suffering and the sacrifice of their young lives.

"It was not long until Immortelle was practicing successfully again, with a numerous and fashionable clientele.

He soon acquired a reputation for philanthropy by contributing princely sums to various orphanages and other charitable institutions for children, and was always ready and willing to attend the little unfortunates they harbored, giving his services freely and without charge. Also, he did much charity work amongst the children of the poor, although not nearly so much as he was given credit for doing. I myself did a large portion of the work he was credited with. He was known to be deeply interested in the study of heredity and was a specialist in blood transfusion, which becomes increasingly safer, because of the continuous progress in aseptic surgery and the classification of humanity into groups according to the constituents of their blood.

"When at last his reputation seemed firmly established, he purchased an old house in the midst of a large, wooded acreage close to the ocean shore and within sound of the breakers, many miles south of the city. It had formerly belonged to an eccentric and wealthy recluse, who had chosen this secluded situation for his retirement. The advent of the automobile had changed conditions somewhat and a highway ran a comparatively short distance from the place. The house was an old, rambling structure. It stands on a rocky promontory overlooking the ocean, surrounded on two sides by a tall, thick cypress hedge. Little did the passing motorists dream of the stairs that led down through solid rock to a tunnel connecting with the ocean, and in which a stout boat was always moored.

"It was here that we established an orphanage and sanitarium for a small number of children, after thoroughly remodeling the old place. For these

children Immortelle had conceived a deep and eternal interest and affection, but he sometimes remarked, with the most wisful expression and in an extremely melancholy tone, that no sooner had he become deeply attached to one of his young proteges than Fate would operate in some strange way to deprive him of their companionship—a fact which I thoroughly understood and was well able to confirm. He might also have added that Fate had seen fit to deprive him of the services of several nurses who had assisted at transfusion operations which had terminated unfortunately.

"Of course all our philanthropic efforts to avert disgrace did not terminate as we could desire. There were a number of mysterious disappearances of young women from that region which have never been explained to the satisfaction of—shall we use the stereotyped formula of 'the police' or the 'general public'? But in the public mind our own institution was never connected with them in any way until that accident in Deep Canyon.

"During the influenza epidemic, beautiful Linnie Chaumelle entered into our lives again, Linnie whom we had known as a child in Idaho and whose little brother Vernon had virtually met death at our hands. All the nurses in San Francisco were either in attendance on victims of the epidemic or ill themselves when it made its appearance at our orphanage. Linnie had chosen the career of a trained nurse. There is no finer or nobler under heaven. Her parents had both died when she was quite young and the family had become widely separated. Very likely she had forgotten the names of Immortelle and

myself. Albert engaged her without a personal interview, contrary to his usual habit, on the recommendation of a brother physician. It was something we had never done before, but our need was urgent. When they met, it was obvious to me, who knew him so well, that with Dr. Immortelle, the selfish, cynical, absolutely conscienceless man of the world, it was a case of love at first sight!

"It was not to be wondered at. Linnie Chaumelle is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen during more than a century and a half of evil living. She could well have served some great artist as the model for an angel, with her rose-leaf skin, her masses of chestnut hair with its glints of gold framing her lovely face; and those large, limpid blue eyes, through which one may glimpse her radiant soul.

"As time passed, it became increasingly evident that, for the first time in his evil existence, Albert had fallen victim to that little god who is no respecter of persons. Day by day I watched his love for Linnie grow. He vainly endeavored to exert his undoubtedly great hypnotic powers over her, but no evil power could affect that pure spirit that occupied a plane so vastly superior to his own. I had determined, in any event, that her mind should be kept free from the octopus-like tentacles of his hypnotic powers at any cost to myself.

"As I have said, all our philanthropic efforts did not terminate as successfully as we could have desired. It was while Linnie was at the sanitarium that one of the disastrous terminations occurred. Linnie is not naturally suspicious, but she is a young woman of more than average intelli-

gence. As a nurse, she possesses from observation a wide knowledge of evil in countless manifestations; but her own soul has remained uncontaminated. She had not been there long before various circumstances combined to arouse her suspicions.

"I have mentioned a subterranean passage. It was convenient in case of emergency; and yet we found that stout ropes and even chains attached to pallid bodies of unfortunates and anchored by heavy weights have been snapped asunder by the violence of the breakers on that rocky coast. It was an incident of that nature that led to Immortelle's decision to dispose otherwise of the remains of a young and beautiful unfortunate and that likewise led to our undoing. Fate is a tricky hag! I should say, more correctly, what I now know to be the truth, that the time was at hand for reaping what we had sown.

"We had spent most of the previous night in digging a grave in the mellow soil of a small, isolated country place down the Peninsula. The ground belonged to me and I objected to this use of it, but my objections were silenced as usual by Immortelle. We removed the mute witness of our evil deeds from the sanitarium under cover of darkness, as we supposed, without the knowledge of any of the inmates except the one nurse attendant on that case. We had no reason to fear that she would make any damaging disclosures.

"Immortelle placed the poor body in the rear seat and sat beside it, supporting it in an upright position, while I drove the car. As I have said, he was by nature cowardly, and not all the transfusions from the veins of courageous donors had ever over-

come this tendency. A large touring car followed us somewhat closely. Immortelle suspected that they had some suspicion of our sinister design, or that they might contemplate a hold-up. I think he was entirely wrong, but at any rate he became greatly agitated and was thrown into a perfect paroxysm of terror. His great black eyes rolled like the eyes of a maniac, his pallid face forming a startling contrast to his raven hair. His forehead was covered with great drops of perspiration and he was shaking as if with an ague. In any event, they could hardly have overtaken us. Our car was specially constructed for speed—as a physician's car should be, of course! Only we knew what speed it was capable of attaining. But he was terror-stricken, incapable of reasoning.

"'Faster! Faster!' he screamed, as I drove the car at dangerous speed around sharp curves on the brink of a five-hundred-foot precipice. We managed to elude our pursuers, if such they were, by turning off into a little-used road and waiting until they had passed; then we turned back into the main road. Never have I seen a human being in such a panic. In spite of my remonstrances he made me stop as close to the brink as possible, where the canon wall fell away below us for hundreds of feet, and compelled me to assist in pushing the poor girl's body over the edge into the abyss below. Then we re-entered the car and drove on to the city.

"In the ordinary course of events, the corpse would have remained undiscovered for years, perhaps until identification had become difficult, if not impossible; but in avoiding Scylla, we had become engulfed in Charybdis. Some Boy Scouts climbed down into

the canon next day to recover a lost hat and made the gruesome discovery of the remains!

"The papers were full of pictures of the poor victim who was not identified for a considerable space of time. They were full of supposed details of the crime. We felt comparatively safe, as only one of our nurses had been in attendance on the victim and we had every reason to feel sure of her discretion and loyalty. We had taken special precautions in regard to the arrival at the sanitarium of the girl now dead, so we felt confident that only the three of us had seen her there; but it happened that, of all persons in the world, Linnie had by accident, through the opening of the wrong door on a certain occasion, obtained a passing glimpse of her and recognized her picture! She went to Immortelle at once. Her wonderful eyes rested steadily on his as she said:

"'I will ask you to take me to the city immediately, Dr. Immortelle.'

"He remonstrated, but it was useless, so he agreed that we should take her in to the city that evening. Then he laid the hideous plan in which I apparently acquiesced.

"'She knows too much, now!' he said, his face distorted with rage and fear. 'She must be silenced!' I shuddered. I had heard those words from him so many times in the course of close to a hundred and fifty years. I am certain he had come to feel the same towards me because of my increasing repugnance toward the course we were pursuing, which must have been obvious to him. My awakening conscience must have become a source of alarm to this man, himself, without even the vestige of such an inconvenient faculty. I believe that he had

planned my removal, as soon as it could be conveniently accomplished and he could secure the assistance of a confederate to take my place.

"We owned a cabin in a secluded nook, not far from the road, yet far enough to prevent any sounds of terror or agony from being heard by passing motorists. It had proven convenient for our purposes on more than one occasion. Its windows were heavily shuttered and it was surrounded by dense shrubs and trees, so that its existence would ordinarily have remained unsuspected by passers-by. Immortelle proposed that we should start for the city with Linnie. We were to develop engine trouble when opposite the cabin. Knowing that Linnie would not care to remain alone with him on the highway, such was the repugnance with which he evidently inspired her, I was to go to the cabin for the tools we should find necessary, and she was to accompany me. The rest would be easy, he judged from certain past experiences of a similar nature. After she had been drugged and rendered insensible and was at his mercy—after she had been kept at the pleasure of his will as long as suited his purpose, he judged she would become sufficiently tractable. Her own few remaining relatives were far away and she would probably not be missed for an indefinite period.

"I had an entirely different plan. I revered Linnie as I have never revered any other woman. I instinctively sensed the incorruptible purity of her soul, her unlimited sympathy of that maternal character which persists, though even in the very slightest degree, in the most debased and corrupted specimen of femininity. I would gladly have given my life to

save her from him. I had no hope that she would ever care for me—no desire to bind her pure life to mine, with its innumerable crimes. I had ceased to crave for continued existence. The many crimes in which I had been Immortelle's accomplice, although for years unwillingly, lay heavy on my conscience. From myself the world had nothing more to fear; but the conscience of Immortelle was unawakened. He was a menace to humanity. I decided that the greatest service I could render humanity would be to put an end to his career, even at the sacrifice of my own life.

"We left the orphanage that evening after dinner. I was driving. Linnie occupied the seat beside me, refusing to sit in the rear seat with Immortelle, where, unknown to herself, only a short time before he had supported the body of a victim. Not far from the cabin that was to be her destination, and not far distant from the place where we had thrown the body of the young nurse over the canyon wall, I ran over a pedestrian. He was a tramp, clad in khaki-colored clothing—you know its low range of visibility—but we might have avoided striking him had it not been for the excessive speed at which we were traveling.

"'Drive on! Drive on, you fool!'" screamed Immortelle as I stopped the car. All of us got out. The man was fatally injured but he still breathed.

"'Dead!'" said Albert nonchalantly. He took the victim by the feet and dragged him out of the road.

"'Get in!'" he ordered, as Linnie stood there, white with horror.

"'Surely you will not leave him

there!' she gasped. 'The man is not dead.'

"'He is only a tramp! What difference can his life or death make?' snarled Immortelle.

"'He is a human being! If you leave him here you will leave me with him!' she said defiantly. The spotlight shone on Immortelle's face. It was black with rage and murderous. *And then Linnie remembered!*

"'I know you now, you fiend!' she said, and took a step nearer and shook her finger accusingly at him.

"'You are the man who killed my little brother!'

"Immortelle snarled like a trapped animal. There was the flash of steel in his hand; but before he could spring on Linnie with the knife, I had struck him on the head with a revolver. Then I trussed him up with a tow-rope and a dog-chain we had in the car. The tramp had breathed his last. I dragged both of them into the bushes. I put Linnie into the car.

"'I will return for them,' I said in answer to her unspoken question. We started for the nearest little railroad station, thinking she could catch the midnight local to the city. On the way I gave her the barest outline of this story. She is a nurse and acquainted with the marvelous results of trans-fusion, with all the latest aids and discoveries of the scientific medical world. Perhaps she thought me a mere mad-man, but I fully believe she accepted my story and had faith in my repentance. I made her promise to say nothing *until she should hear from me again*. I wanted to keep her name out of the papers. You know what they are. We had engine trouble in truth and it was late when we reached the outskirts of the little station where

she was to take the train. Immortelle and myself and our car were well known there and I judged it best, in spite of the lateness of the hour, for her to proceed alone.

"'You will probably never see me again,' I said at parting. 'Think kindly of me sometimes, if you can.'

"'Do not go back!' she begged. 'I am afraid for you! He will kill you!'

"Perhaps she sensed that bit of good in me which persists in the most hardened. I had saved her. Perhaps she grasped my plan, telepathically, and shrank from its accomplishment, for her forebears have been law-abiding people for many generations. I took her hand and kissed it. The little innocent, with an impulse which sprang from her recognition of my genuine repentance, her gratitude, and her own strong maternal instinct of protection, put up her pure lips for me to kiss, she with her lily-white soul and I with my soul as black as my face once was! I was not fit to touch the hem of her garment with my lips, but I kissed her once. Nothing can erase the memory of that kiss. That second of supreme bliss was enough to recompense me for all I must face here and in the hereafter. I know you do not begrudge it to me, you who are destined to be her mate. Remember that, though I have practically become Aryan in body, my soul is still that of an Ethiopian—and colored people have strange moments of clairvoyance, whose reason is known only to the occultist.

"I drove away and left her. I have seen death in countless forms; I have been an accomplice, times without number, in what practically amounted to murder under the guise of sci-

tific experimentation; I have witnessed scenes of horror whose remembrance fills me with an agony of remorse; and tears had been strangers to my eyes for what seemed like ages; but when I drove away and left her there, I could hardly see to drive for the blessed tears that filled my eyes. You know what happened—that she was too late for the local and started to walk to San Mateo, carrying her heavy suitcase. And how you came along and picked her up, thank God!

"I returned to the spot where I had left Immortelle and the body of the tramp. It makes cold chills run up and down my spine even now when I remember the look in Immortelle's eyes when I turned my flashlight on him where he lay bound and gagged. His eyes seemed to emit veritable flashes of venomous light. I almost quailed before him, bound and helpless as he was; but the thought of Linnie put courage into me. And I realized that my failure to carry out my plan meant death for me. My one fear was that someone would come along before my work was done, but there was little traffic over that road at night.

"Now I am going to drive both of us over the cliff," I said. "If it were not for dragging *her* name through the mire, I would surrender myself and you to the authorities. But Justice is sometimes slow and uncertain. My plan seems the surest. I do not hold myself less guilty than yourself, although you were the greatest criminal in the beginning. However, I awoke, long ago, to the enormity of our crimes and would have endeavored to atone, in some measure, had you allowed me to do so. I have never been able to detect the slightest evi-

dence of repentance in you. I wish it were possible for you to meet the fate you so richly deserve, in full possession of your faculties, but I dare not risk it. I shall be compelled to give you a few shots in the arm to insure your good behavior, for I shall have to unbind you to make the execution appear to be an accident." Almost it seemed that he would break even the stout chain in his frantic struggles to escape the awful fate that threatened. I drove the needle in deliberately, and often enough to render him incapable of resistance.

"I placed the tramp in the middle of the road. Then I lifted Immortelle into the machine, backed down the road some distance, came on at the rate of forty miles an hour or more, swerved the car as if in an effort to avoid running over the body of the tramp, and the next instant we were falling through space—down—down—

"You know how they picked up Immortelle, crushed and battered out of all semblance to his former self; how a tree broke my fall and they found me with my head and face unmarred, but with my back broken by the boulder I struck. Obviously, the papers all agreed, and I later corroborated them, that it was an accident due to the driver's swerving the car sharply in an effort to avoid running over the tramp. The most puzzling feature was the presence of a woman's footprints at the scene of the tragedy, a mystery which has never been solved! A possible solution was that the tramp had been struck by a hit-and-run woman motorist, who, finding that her car had killed the pedestrian, after getting out and examining him, had driven away and feared to report the accident.

"Immortelle's vast fortune will revert to the State, as he left no heirs. My own fortune I have left to be used for scientific and medical research, more especially with regard to blood transfusion and its free and scientific application for the benefit of suffering humanity.

"Sometimes as I lie here, I wonder if evil, or what we call by that name, is ever employed in the scheme of things for good ends. Can it be needed, like the substance we place at the roots of flowers to cause them to bloom more luxuriantly and more radiantly? Well, I shall soon know!" he said with that prescience of approaching death with which I was so soon to become familiar on the battlefields of France. He passed away that night.

Before I left him he made me promise to give his story to the world, believing that in proper hands, under scientific supervision, transfusion might prove of tremendous value to humanity; that it might be employed, not only to rejuvenate, but to repair and remedy both physical and mental defects.

I have done my best. As I have said in the beginning, I am only a mining engineer, more familiar with the symbols of mineralogy and chemistry than with figures of speech.

Linnie and I both went across to France soon after our marriage. I remember the night we left San Francisco. There was no moon. The waters of the Bay were like a pool of black ink in which the vari-colored lights of the ships were reflected. To the south, a huge electric sign showed blood-colored through the smoke of some giant smokestack where men toiled in the sweat of their brows "to make the world safe for Democracy!"

A wisp of smoke from a passing steamer was wrapped around the Ferry tower, almost concealing it, and above it the light on its summit shone like a symbol of Hope; but the Germans bombed the Red Cross tent where Linnie ministered to the sorely wounded! Although I escaped alive from the hell of the Argonne, I lie here almost as helpless as Victor de Lyle when I saw him last, longing for the time when my soul shall be reunited with its mate.

The End

Don't Miss

BRIAN W. ALDISS NEW NOVELET

SEND HER VICTORIOUS

IN THE JUNE AMAZING

SPAWN OF DARKNESS

CRAIG BROWNING

Illustrated by EDMOND SWIATEK

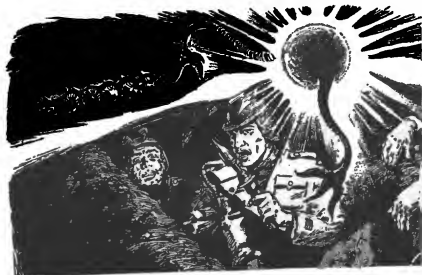
Give a man like Joe unlimited power and what's the first thing he'll do with it? Save his own skin, of course. And after that he'll give a little party . . .

"OH, God!" Joe gasped. The pencil-thick, mile long beam from the enemy mobile synchrotron was cutting through the advancing line. It moved up and down so that it couldn't be escaped even by leaping or by dropping prone. There

were no depressions or foxholes, for possibel sanctuary either.

No escape.

Joe looked at the men running on either side of him. Their sweat and dirt streaked faces showed no expression other than fatigue. They



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weren't men, but automatons, one eye on that inexorable pencil of terrible energy moving toward them, the other on the ground ahead of them where they would pass.

But a fierce, glad light appeared in the eyes of one of them. Joe followed his gaze. One man, by some miracle, had dodged the beam. He had leaped right and ducked right—and avoided it.

Envy suddenly settled into Joe's mind. He wouldn't be that lucky. In another few seconds now—

He risked a glance ahead at the low lying hills where the enemy tanks with their synchrotrons were coming forward. They were absolutely impregnable, except to another of their kind. Those terrible pencils of energy, of electrons travelling at two-thirds of the speed of light, up to almost the

full speed of light. The mass of an electron was supposed to increase with its speed, so that the ones going at almost the speed of light had masses up in the ounces, instead of ten or more points to the right of the decimal point.

Nothing could stop them and survive. They disintegrated the very atmosphere. Where one hit into the soil it left a thin, slate-like slab of fused stuff. Where one passed across the face of foot thick armor plate, it left a crumbling mortar of stuff that had been mostly iron molecules, but was no longer.

Where one cut through a living body it divided it into two halves that were crusted over with a dry, crisp shell. They said you didn't feel it when it happened to you. You just heard your upper half settling onto



your lower half like two leaves rattling together. Then you tumbled forward. You didn't even die, at first. You just lay there, knowing that from the waist on down was nothing. Sometimes it took hours to die.

And this senseless charging against those moving fortresses—some arm-chair brass-hat back home who didn't know what it was about was responsible for that.

What good would it do to reach those tanks, those moving behemoths? No sense to it.

Suddenly the landscape jumped crazily.

"This is it," Joe said with his lips. He was falling forward. He saw the dirt and grass rushing toward his face. He dropped his gun and tried to ward off the blow with his hands.

All sorts of strange and painful sensations were coming from his legs—not his legs, but the severed and baked nerve endings of his spinal cord.

"It's a peculiar experience," he was thinking now. "Too bad I can't live long enough to write it all out."

It was getting dark. It was hard to breathe. Instinctively Joe clawed at the dirt to roll over. He succeeded, and in doing so he made a startling, hair-raising discovery.

He still had his legs. They had helped him turn over.

He lay there, his thoughts a storm of conflicting thoughts, feelings, and emotions, looking upward at the small jagged circle of sky.

And finally he knew what had happened. He had fallen through the flimsy roof of some dugout.

At that moment he was quite unbalanced.

And at that moment one of the mobile synchrotrons of his own side

swung into action, its pencil thick beam a bright sword.

Joe watched it as it appeared over the hole he had made in the earth with his fall. It moved into view and paused. Then another moved into view.

He didn't know it, but what was about to happen had only one chance in countless billions of taking place. The two beams of electrons met. At the instant they met they destroyed each others' generating units. That was to be expected.

But also, just above the jagged hole in the ground, two electrons met in head-on flight, at a relative speed almost twice that of light.

In the parlance of modern nuclear physics, each of the two electrons was an imaginary positron to the other, striking it at twice light speed. Perhaps no scientist could possibly iron out the contradictions actually involved in that meeting. The simple fact remains that at one instant there were two electrons, and the next instant there was—*something else*.

Perhaps Nature herself was not equipped to cope with the contradictions of that meeting. In the frame of reference which had Joe for its rest point, the two electrons had had infinite mass. Or as near to that as could be attained. And they were mutually imaginary in their own frames. It may be that this mutual imaginariness reached a compromise in the common frame; the *something else* that resulted was neither real nor imaginary, but in an extra-cosmic way, both.

To Joe, one minute the two pencil beams of energy were coming together over the hole, against the background of the sky. The next

minute they were gone, and a transparently black *something* hovered motionless, one smoky tendril drifting downward into his tomb-like pit.

It meant nothing to him. His raw dry mouth did. He needed a drink. He wanted a drink. The wish is father of the act. He reached to his belt for the small canteen of water.

The transparently black tendril beat his hand to it, wrapping itself around the cloth covered canteen. Unbelievably he saw a finger tendril split from the rest and unfasten it from his belt.

The canteen rose with the arm of black smoke and tipped to his lips. He drank a little and spit the rest out, rinsing the dust from his mouth.

"Being crazy is fun," he decided gravely. Pasting a silly grin on his dirt-streaked face, he looked at the transparently black wisp that had picked up the canteen and said, "If you're going to be an arm and hand with fingers, why not look like one?"

A sentient black intelligence seemed to course through the ghostly black transparency, swirling it. It became a muscular arm ending in a perfectly formed hand with four fingers and a thumb. It lost its transparency hovering outside.

Joe looked at the arm critically. Its black was the most peculiar black he had ever seen. Its sheen seemed to come, not from reflection, but from inner luminescence. There seemed to be lack of reflection from it in a cosmically absolute sense of the word.

It was like—was like—Joe tried to form a mental image of what it was like. It was like ordinarily the eyes leaned against the light, and with this black arm there was nothing for

the eye to lean against. That was it, even though its skin glistened.

"Sooo . . ." Joe said softly, an intense satisfaction in his voice. He wiped his face with his sleeve and stood up. Glancing around, he saw that he was in a rather large makeshift cave. It might even be called a pitfall. Its roof was merely thin logs covered with dirt.

Joe glanced back at the arm. It was still obediently poised, hanging from the jagged hole in the roof. That irritated him.

"If you're going to have an arm," he said, "why don't you come down and finish the body."

He watched as the arm dropped lazily, followed by a swirling, ever more solid stream of transparent black. He watched as it took form. And he realized finally that its form-making was slow and questioning, that its shape was conforming to his criticism, unvoiced.

Finally it was complete. There was something strangely familiar about it. What was it? A memory rose in his mind of an illustration in an oriental book of a genii standing before a man. The genii had been about ten feet tall, slightly fat, especially in the face, jet black of skin, with a colorful costume and huge white turban.

That memory was what the stuff had conformed to. It had reached into his mind and shaped itself from the pattern of his own thoughts! What manner of stuff was it? There seemed no answer.

"Do you know what you are?" Joe asked.

"I am the genii, master," the giant turbaned figure intoned—and again Joe knew it had plucked its very words from his mind. Even so, its lips

moved normally, and Joe had a feeling that each thing the genii sensed, it hung onto. Next time it said that, it would do so from its own memory. The next, it would take the shape it had at this moment.

Now, suddenly, the ground under Joe's feet was trembling. He knew what it meant. The mobile fortresses with their synchrotrons were advancing. He looked around his prison with a new comprehension. This was a pit designed to trap one of those huge tanks. At any minute one might plunge in on him.

"Get me outta here!" he said urgently.

"Where do you wish to go, master?" the genii asked.

"Take me home," Joe said. "Yes, that's it. Take me home to good ol' Moab, Washington, America!"

The genii picked Joe up and cradled him in his arms. For an instant Joe had a strange impression of being lost in a choking sea of black.

He gasped for breath. Then, assuddenly, he was inhaling deep lungs full of fresh mountain air. Black arms were setting him gently on the ground. Familiar Pines were scattered here and there. In the distance was the snow-capped Mount Spokane, unmistakable.

The genii straightened up and folded its arms, its huge white turban looming twelve feet above the ground, its fat black face serenely expressionless.

"Well, well, well, we did it," Joe said, his voice hysterically thin.

Fifty feet away was the road. It was familiar. Joe had played in this very field many times, and every square foot of it was familiar.

"I can visit the folks!" he said. "And my girl friend!" He looked at

the giant genii thoughtfully. "But I gotta hide you some way."

His eyes dropped to the water canteen hanging at his belt. Geniis were supposed to be kept in jugs. Maybe it would do.

He emptied out the water and set the empty stainless steel covered with canvas canteen on the ground and stepped back. There was doubt in his voice as he ordered the genii to enter it.

The genii's giant bulk slowly lost its shape. A thin tendril of black transparency drifted down to the neck of the canteen, and entered it. Slowly the rest followed, until there was no sign of the genii or the blackly transparent haze.

"Are you all in?" Joe asked thinly.

"Yes, master," a deep voice intoned from the canteen.

Joe snapped the cap on it and fastened it to his belt again. It seemed no heavier than it would have, filled with water. That was surprising, considering that it now contained what had been a ten or twelve-foot solid giant. But by now Joe was completely immune to surprises.

He patted the canteen, and realized he had been a little afraid of the genii. Now it couldn't come out until he took off the cap and let it. Everything was under control.

Whistling happily, he went to the road and started toward home. His trench helmet was caked with dust. His face was streaked with dirt. His rifle was strung over his shoulder. His uniform was dirty and ripped from his fall into the tank trap. And the canteen containing the genii swung against his hip at every step.

The house came into view. He pushed open the gate and walked up the path, circling the house to the back

door. Odors of home cooking wafted—literally wafted—through an open kitchen window to his nostrils.

He bounded up the back steps and flung open the door. His mother was kneading dough on a breadboard on the table. She looked up.

"Mom!" Joe shouted. Then they were in each other's arms.

Two weeks passed. They were wonderful weeks for Joe, but also weeks during which he found time to worry occasionally. It would have been quite all right for him to have been killed back there on the battlefield. Being home was something else. He could be court-martialed and shot for it.

However, he didn't worry too much. As his mother had often said, "My Joe isn't one to worry about things."

The canteen containing the genii lay in one corner on a shelf in his clothes closet, almost forgotten. The rationalizing processes of Joe's mind were already making him doubt that there was a genii in it.

He was even beginning to half believe the lies he had distributed on every hand of getting a leave to come home. Margie, his girl friend, had welcomed him with open arms. They had been two wonderful weeks for her, the only girl in town to have her sweetheart home.

No one questioned his being home. And if his mother sometimes wore a troubled look as she recalled his appearance when he had first stood in the kitchen doorway, an appearance more in keeping with a man fresh off the battlefield than one fresh off the train, she kept her thoughts to herself. It was enough for her that he was home.

The came the night that she woke

up with the feeling that some *presence* was in the house. Not able to go back to sleep, she finally arose and strode softly into the hall. There was a light under Joe's door. She placed her ear against the panel, not to snoop, but to see if he was all right.

Through the flimsy thickness of the door panel came the sound of two voices, one Joe's, the other belonging to a stranger . . .

The genii sneezed.

"I didn't know you could catch cold," Joe said.

"Two weeks in that damp jug would give the cork the sniffles," the genii replied.

"It's all in your mind," Joe replied. "You're just aping me. I'd catch cold and sneeze, so you do. You don't have to, you know."

"I don't?" the genii interrupted a sneeze to say. And it was his last sneeze. But it had planted an idea in its complex that was to become the foundation of something.

"The reason I called you out," Joe said, getting down to cases, "was because I want to pull a little magic stuff at a shindig I'm going to tomorrow night."

"I am yours to command, master," the genii intoned.

. . . Joe's mother stole softly back to bed, but not to sleep. When the sun came up a few hours later she was staring dry-eyed at the ceiling.

The alarm clock clicked, preparing to sound off. She shut it off and rose.

She felt very much alone this morning. It was one of the times she wished Joe's father was still alive. If he had been there she could have told him her troubles.

"Aw now, ma," he would have said. "Tain't nothing to bother about. It'll

all come out." And she would have felt better.

Mechanically she went about the morning tasks. Getting the cookstove fire going, milking the cow, feeding the chickens and the pig she was raising on account of meat rationing, and gathering the precious eggs.

When she returned to the kitchen the teakettle was singing its morning welcome. The heat of the stove had spread a cozy warmth throughout the room.

Almost cheerful, she started to break the usual four eggs in the frying pan, two for her and two for Joe. Then she put two of them back in the bowl. She would let Joe sleep.

It was a lonely breakfast for her. There had been two years of lonely breakfasts for her while Joe was overseas, but none of them had been quite so lonely as this one, with him asleep upstairs.

She forced herself to eat her normal breakfast. She listened to the radio, her face occasionally almost cracking a smile at some joke of the irrepressible disc jockey.

It was nine o'clock before she finished and started to do up the dishes. She ran the hot water over the soap powder in the dishpan, swishing it around with her hands, letting the clean suds pop against her arms.

The front doorbell rang. She hastily wiped her hands and arms on a towel, shut off the hot water, and went to answer its call.

A small old man in a Western Union uniform stood on the front porch. He handed her a telegram, holding out his book and pencil. She signed with shaking fingers.

She closed the door and went back to the kitchen and sat down at the

table, the unopened telegram in her fingers. She looked at it. The envelope had a dark border around its edge. She had never received a telegram before in her life. But somewhere in her memory was tucked away a fragment of conversation about telegrams announcing a death having such a black border.

Before she opened it she knew what it would say. It informed her of the fact that her son, Joe Ryan, was missing in action and presumed to be dead.

For a long time she sat there motionless, her eyes blank. Then she carefully folded the telegram and put it in her purse laying on the windowledge. After that she began washing the dishes.

The cardboard sign tacked on the door said *Madama Ona*, and was followed by an enigmatic "Readings." The room on the other side of the door had succeeded in attaining an inexpensive atmosphere of authentic Mystery.

That *Madame Ona's* name by birth was Ludwiga Krakovitsch, that she had been born in Brooklyn, and that she had five minutes before finished hanging out her weekly wash, were by no means to be construed as subtracting from the very real value of her advice, nor as evidence that the spirits that came at her bidding were not genuine.

The gypsy robe hastily flung over her soapsuds dampened housedress and the shawl flung over her uncombed hair were more than enough to make Mrs. Ryan nod her head imperceptibly with relief and satisfaction when viewed above the crystal ball resting on a black plush pillow, and the

well worn tarot cards strewn over the surface of the table.

"Yes?" Madame Ona said, with just the lift to make it neither a question nor a statement.

"It's about my son Joe," Mrs. Ryan said, plunging herself into the chair opposite Madame Ona and opening her purse.

Her trembling fingers drew out the folded telegram. Madame Ona's experienced eyes took in the black border of the envelope.

"Ah, yes, your son Joe," she intoned. When Mrs. Ryan opened her mouth to speak, she held up her hand to silence her, then raised her head and held her other hand over her eyes, as though communing with the spirits. "I see him," she intoned. "He's on the battlefield. There are many dead around him. And he has fallen too. Yes, he had been killed in battle." She opened her eyes looked closely at Mrs. Ryan, deciding rightly that there was little money here, and nobly that there was a real need of moral assistance beyond the call of money. She continued in a more practical tone. "You came here to see if I could contact the spirit of your son so you can find out if he's all right where he is?"

"Oh, no," Mrs. Ryan said. "You see, he's home, and he's very happy."

"Then he isn't dead!" Madame Ona said, a flash of anger at having been tricked in her dark eyes.

"Yes, he's dead," Mrs. Ryan said. "That's why I came to see you."

"Oh, I see," Madame Ona said, only feebly trying to make her voice all knowing. She looked at Mrs. Ryan queerly.

"You see," Mrs. Ryan went on eagerly, taking the telegram out of

its envelope and spreading it on the table. "It says he was killed in action overseas on March fourteenth, and that was when he came home, his uniform torn, a freshly bleeding scratch on his leg, his face dirty and tired, but happy and smiling in spite of it."

"But the telegram is undoubtedly a mistake," Madame Ona said, more to herself than to her client. "No doubt there is more than one Joseph Ryan, and they got them mixed up."

"No," Mrs. Ryan said flatly. "There's something else I haven't dared to tell anybody."

She reached into her purse once more and drew out a letter of the type telephotoed from army bases overseas. Madame Ona took it and looked at the datemark. It was dated March thirteenth.

"Your son is an officer?" she asked sharply.

"No, just a private first class," Mrs. Ryan said.

"I see," Madame Ona said, licking dry lips. Behind her calm front she was beginning to regret her choice of vocation. At long last it had come, the genuine supernatural case; for it was obvious that no Private first class would be given leave to come all the way home in the first place, with the war going so badly, and in the second place he could not have arrived home the day after he wrote a letter overseas, even though he had. In the third place, if he had, he wouldn't have arrived in a torn uniform and with dirt on his face, and a fresh cut on his leg.

A word rose in her mind, but she didn't utter it aloud. That word was *poltergeist*, and it denoted a spirit of the dead who materialized and went

around as if still alive, and didn't even know it was dead.

"Tell me everything, Mrs. Ryan," Madame Ona said crisply. "Don't leave out anything."

Mrs. Ryan took her at her word, even to the extent of going back into Joe's childhood to bring out various points.

"So you had a feeling even when you first saw him standing in the doorway to the kitchen with his field uniform on that it wasn't really him, but his ghost?" Madame Ona asked at one point.

"Yes," Mrs. Ryan said. "And when the letter came a week ago I looked at the date the very first thing, and then I knew."

"Why didn't you come to me then?" Madame Ona asked.

"Because he was so happy," Mrs. Ryan said.

"Isn't he still happy?" Madame Ona persisted.

"Yes," Mrs. Ryan said. "But after what happened last night I'm afraid."

"Oh," Madame Ona said. "Now we come to it. What happened last night?"

"It was that other voice in his room," Mrs. Ryan said. "The one that called him 'Master'."

"Oh?" Madame Ona said, pricking up her ears. "What did this other voice say? And did you see—*what* it belonged to?"

"It was in his room with him," Mrs. Ryan said. "I didn't dare open the door to see. But Joe said, as nearly as I can remember, 'I called you out because I want to pull a little magic stuff tonight.' And this—whatever it was, said, 'I am yours to command, Master.'"

"Oh, it did, did it," Madame Ona

said quietly. "And what happened?"

"Nothing yet," Mrs. Ryan said. "Joe meant tonight, when he's having his girlfriend and some others over for a little party."

"Then the thing to do is to be there tonight and see what happens," Madame Ona said reluctantly.

"Oh, could you?" Mrs. Ryan said eagerly. "How much—that is, it wouldn't cost too much?"

"You can pay me five dollars now," Madame Ona said, her professional greed getting the best of her for the moment. "We'll talk about the rest later."

"Oh, thank you so much," Mrs. Ryan said gratefully. "If you can bring Joe's spirit to rest money couldn't possibly compensate for it." She took a worn five dollar bill out of her purse and gave it to Madame Ona. "Now, the way you get out to our place."

She was still thanking Madame Ona when the door closed on her. When she was gone Madame Ona shed her cloak and shawl and became herself, Ludwiga Krakdvitsch. Locking the door, she went to the phone. Shortly she was connected with the phone of a very scholarly looking gentleman of her acquaintance.

"Listen, Dr. Wright," she said, her voice low-pitched and eager. "Is that ten thousand dollars for a genuine supernatural manifestation still unclaimed? Well listen. I have what I'm convinced is a poltergeist. If you're free this evening, and can bring some witnesses along with you, I think I can lay claim to that money. You are? Good! You can pick me up at eight o'clock. G'bye."

"Now remember," Joe said firmly.

"You are to remain invisible unless I order you to appear. You are to do everything I tell you to do while you're invisible. Also you might think of a few harmless tricks to do yourself."

"Your wishes are my commands, Master," the genii intoned, its giant fat face glistening blackly under its enormous white turban, its large hands folded together at the sash across the waist of its gaudy oriental costume.

Joe clapped his hands once, sharply. The genii vanished in a puff of smoke in the best of traditional manner. Joe nodded his satisfaction with the performance, opened the door, and went downstairs.

"Hi, Margie," he greeted the smiling blonde that watched him from the foot of the stairs as he came down. He took her in his arms casually. They kissed, then separated until only the fingers of one hand joined them affectionately. And on one finger of Margie's hand was a modest diamond.

"Guess everybody's here," Joe said, surveying the crowd sprawled around the living room.

"Not everybody yet," Mrs. Ryan said from the kitchen. "A friend of mine you haven't met yet is coming over with a couple of friends. You don't mind, do you, Joe?"

"Of course not," Joe said. "The more the merrier." He grinned at his inner secret. Then he fixed his eyes sternly on Freddy Blish, Margie's fourteen year old brother. "Freddy, where is your cap supposed to be put when you come into the house?"

"In the hall," Freddy said, "where it is right now."

"Is it?" Joe asked sinisterly. "What's that on your head?"

Every eye turned to Freddy as he

raised his hand to his head. One instant there was nothing there but his shock of unruly hair. Just before his hand reached it, a cap suddenly materialized on his head.

The look on his face was quite ludicrous as he slowly took the hat off. Everyone was laughing a trifle hysterically, trying to deny in their minds that they had actually seen the hat materialize out of nothing.

"Hey! This isn't my cap!" Freddy said triumphantly. "It's Jimmy Green's."

"Yeah, that's mine!" Jimmy said.

"Guess I slipped up there," Joe said with a superior smile. "Just a little trick I picked up overseas before I came home."

"You're wonderful," Margie took the opportunity to say. "How'd you do it?"

"Very simple," Joe said. "I just—"

The doorbell interrupted him.

"That must be Ona," Mrs. Ryan said, emerging from the kitchen and hurrying across the living room to the front hall. Everyone in the room was in a state of suspended animation, waiting for the newcomers to enter.

They were a rather beautiful woman in her late forties with dark brown skin and a slightly foreign look about her, a rather professorish man with neatly combed gray hair, and a wide-faced dreamy looking man of forty with thin black hair.

"This is my son, Joe," Mrs. Ryan said. "Joe, this is Ludwiga Krakovitsch. (Madame Ona had whispered the name at the front door.) And this is Dr. Wright and Mr. Chad, her friends."

"Glad to meet you," Joe said, smiling. "May I take your wraps?"

"Why, yes," Dr. Wright said. He

had his topcoat half off when it vanished from his grasp and from about his form. In the same instant it was draped across Joe's arm.

There were nervous titters from Joe's friends at the surprised look on Dr. Wright's face.

"Just a little trick I picked up overseas," Joe explained. He stepped around Dr. Wright and hung the coat in the hall.

Dr. Wright exchanged meaningful glances with Madame Ona, Mr. Chad, and Mrs. Ryan. Madame Ona nodded wisely. For an instant Mrs. Ryan's face was haggard, then it resumed its too bright smile once more.

Joe appeared from the hall and took the other wraps in the normal way. Then he made introductions.

"This is my fiance, Margie Blish," he said. "Her brother Freddy, Janie Ingram, Mary Blake, Beth Johnson, Jimmy Green, and Janie's brother, George Ingram."

There were awkwardly polite handshakes.

Madame Ona turned to Joe after completing the amenities and looked him up and down, a dry good humor showing on her face.

"My," she said. "You're more solid looking than I had thought you would be from your mother's description of you."

"That's 'cause he's a solid citizen," Jimmy Green wisecracked. He added a weak, "Ha ha," then pretended to be sick over his own joke.

Dr. Wright now turned his attention to Joe also. Fixing his bifocals more firmly on his nose, and lifting his head to peer through the bottom lenses, he felt of Joe's arm experimentally, squeezing it firmly several times.

"Remarkable," he murmured, turn-

ing his head to Madame Ona. "I would never have believed it possible." Still holding Joe's bicep he turned to Mr. Chad. "Here," he commanded. "Feel of him."

Mr. Chad approached Joe with fear in his eyes. He squeezed Joe's shoulder as though he were ready to jump back at the slightest move. Then he shook his head and said, "Chk chk chk chk. Unbelievable."

"Say," Joe said laughingly, "what is this? A gag?"

"No, my boy," Dr. Wright said, a tragic look on his face. "We're here to help you. Please believe me. Just to help you. Nothing more."

"He—he wants to help me!" Joe said to his friends. He laughed hollowly, then swallowed loudly. While his friends laughed uneasily, he ran a finger around inside his collar nervously.

"We *all* want to help you," Madame Ona said seriously.

"What is this?" Joe said. "Mom, what have you been saying to these people?"

"Nothing, Joe," Mrs. Ryan said, blushing.

"Well—" Joe looked vaguely around. "I'll start my show. Freddy!" He fixed a stern eye on Margie's brother. "You're to be my assistant."

"Sure," Freddy said, winking at Jimmy and George to let them know he would try his best to gum things up. "What do you want me to do?"

"Lay down flat on your back on the floor," Joe said. To the others, "This will be an experiment in levitation. I'll try to raise Freddy off the floor without any human hands touching him at any time."

Freddy had plopped to the floor. Now he suddenly rose to a height of five feet, his body rigidly extended.

"Not yet, Freddy," Joe said with mock disgust. "I've got to hypnotize you first."

"Ow!" Freddy had dropped back to the floor with a thump. He started to get up. An unseen force pushed him back down. "Lemme up!" he shouted.

"What's the matter, scared?" George Ingram said in a mixture of fear and derision.

"Yah, you take my place if you're so brave," Freddy said. And instantly it was George on the floor, and Freddy was sitting where George had been.

Joe blinked his eyes in partly feigned surprise.

"You kids can sure move fast," he said.

Freddy and George were too dazed by their sudden change to answer.

"Hmmm," Dr. Wright said, leaning forward. "Most remarkable."

"Most remarkable," Mr. Chad agreed.

"Quite remarkable," twelve year old Jimmy Green said, looking at Dr. Wright owlishly. Dr. Wright frowned, suspecting the youngster was making fun of him.

Mrs. Ryan had been standing in the kitchen doorway during this performance. Now Madame Ona rose impulsively and went to her, putting her arms around her.

"Oh, my dear," Madame Ona said. "I'm so sorry for you." Mrs. Ryan broke into sobs, burying her head in Madame Ona's hair.

"What the heck's the matter with you, mom?" Joe asked, bewildered.

"Nothing, son," Mrs. Ryan said, straightening bravely. "Nothing."

"Ahem!" It was Dr. Wright clearing his throat importantly. "My boy—

Joe, would you care to tell us how it happened?"

"How what happened?" Joe asked. "I don't know what you're talking about."

At that moment the doorbell rang again, startlingly shrill.

Joe answered the door. There were two uniformed policemen standing on the porch. Down in the street was a radio prowler car with another policeman at the wheel. And standing on the steps was a barcheaded man whom Joe recognized as a man living a couple of blocks away.

"That's him!" the man on the steps said angrily.

"What was the idea of throwing rocks at this man and chasing him home, and breaking windows in his house?" one of the policemen demanded.

"What!" Joe exclaimed. "Is somebody crazy? I didn't do any such thing!"

"Yes you did!" the man said. "Don't try to lie out of it."

"You're the liar," Joe said. Then, to the policemen, "Just when was this supposed to happen?"

"Just ten minutes ago," one of them growled.

"Hah!" Joe said triumphantly. "I was here all the time and I have a dozen witnesses to prove it!" He stepped aside so the policemen could look into the living room and see.

"Is that right?" the policeman asked. There were several slow nods from the tight-lipped people in the living room. He turned to the barcheaded man on the step. "Better run along home and forget it," he growled.

"Like heck I will," the man said hotly. "I guess I know Joe when I see him, and it was Joe."

"Gowan," the other policeman said gently pushing the man down the steps.

Joe stared at their departing figures for a moment, then closed the door.

"Let's see now," he said cheerfully. "Where were we? Oh yes, George." He leaned over and made passes over George's head. "You are growing sleepy," he said. "Sleeeeepy . . ."

George closed his eyes and started to breathe deeply.

"Now," Joe said softly. He placed his hands above George's middle, fingers dangling, and raised his arms in a pulling effect. George rose slowly, with nothing touching him. He rose until he was three feet off the floor.

The doorbell rang again, breaking into the quiet concentration in the room like a charge of exploding dynamite. It was followed abruptly by the thump of George's stiff form hitting the floor.

"Damn!" Joe said angrily, striding to the door and throwing it open.

The two policemen were there again, this time with ugly looks on their faces.

"Wise guy, huh?" one of them said. They pushed him ahead of them as they entered the room.

"What do you mean?" Joe asked.

"Don't say you didn't throw a rock through our windshield," he said. "We saw you as plain as day."

"I haven't been out of the house," Joe said. "It must be somebody who looks like me."

"Yeah?" the policeman growled.

"Will all of you people swear he was here all the time and couldn't have thrown a rock through our windshield?" the other policeman said, looking around. He caught sight of

George, lying stiffly on the floor. "What's wrong with him?"

"He's hypnotized," Joe said. "Wake up, George!" He snapped his fingers and George opened his eyes.

"Now then," the policeman said, glancing doubtfully at George. "Was this guy in here all the time?"

"Yes," a chorus of voices answered.

"Then it couldn't have been him," the policeman muttered, turning toward the front hall.

"Ahhh," Dr. Wright said arrestingly. "I would say, officer, that he *could* have done it."

"Huh?" the policeman said, he and his partner turning back into the room. "Then he wasn't here all the time?"

"Oh yes," Dr. Wright said smugly. "May I talk to you two men alone?" He glanced at Joe pityingly. "I don't think *he* should become upset—just yet."

"Sure," the policeman said. "We'll step out on the porch."

Mrs. Ryan was sobbing again against Madame Ona's dandruff-flecked black hair. Mr. Chad was gazing at the rug intently. Joe's friends were watching the policemen and Dr. Wright with mystified expressions.

Joe looked about at all of them with a mixture of feelings, not knowing what to think at being, on the one hand, accused of things he couldn't possibly do, and, on the other hand, treated like something was radically wrong with him.

Now, as the front door closed quietly and sinisterly on the backs of Dr. Wright and the two policemen, he thought of something terrible. If the cops took his name and did any checking, they'd find he was a.w.o.l. from the battlefield!

"Now then," one of the policemen growled when they and Dr. Wright were in the darkness of the porch. "What's this about he could have done it?"

"You see, officer—heh heh—I know it will be hard to believe—" Dr. Wright paused dramatically. "The truth is, that Joseph Ryan is dead."

"That's too bad," the policeman murmured sympathetically. "But what's that got to do with this? And who's Joseph Ryan? That guy's father?"

"I don't know," Dr. Wright said. "His father may be dead. No no. You don't understand. The man you accuse of having broken your windshield, and whom the bareheaded man accused of chasing him and breaking the windows of his house—a typical phenomenon with poltergeists, by the way—is dead. It isn't him. It's his materialized spirit in there."

"No," the two policemen breathed with exaggerated pretense at belief.

"I know it's impossible," Dr. Wright said, feeling more confident of himself. "But it's the truth. He died March fourteenth, on the warfront in Europe. The same day this—apparition that seems to be him—appeared here at home."

"Who did you say you were?" one of the policemen asked innocently.

"Dr. Wright," Dr. Wright said, annoyed at this sudden shift of thought. "You may have heard of me. I'm a noted authority on supernatural phenomena."

"And you say this lad, Joe Ryan, is a soldier, and was overseas on the fourteenth, and is here now—in there?"

"That's what I said," Dr. Wright said, mistaking the trend of the questions.

"Well," the policeman said, feeling he had something he could sink his teeth into now, "That means he's either a.w.o.l. or he had his papers giving him a leave. We'll check on it. Let's go back in."

"But—" Dr. Wright protested. He followed them back into the house with a feeling that he had made no impression on them at all.

"You, Joseph Ryan," the policeman said, trying to sound very formal as a representative of the law. "Let's see your draft card, service card, leave card, and whatever papers you have to prove you're home within the law."

Not only the policeman, but Joe's friends, read the expression that came to his face.

"Joe!" Margie, his fiance, gasped incredulously. "Don't tell me your papers aren't in order!"

"Now just a minute," Joe said, backing up from the slowly advancing policemen. "Take it easy for a minute and I'll explain everything. I know I don't have my leave papers, but there's a very good reason why I don't—if you'll let me explain."

"Yes," Madame Ona spoke up, glancing reassuringly at Joe's mother. "I'm *sure* there is a very good reason why you *can't* arrest Joe. Please, officers, be seated and give us a chance to help Joe straighten it out in his *own* way."

The two officers looked at her, then at Dr. Wright who nodded with voiceless firmness.

"Well . . ." one of them said. They sat down, defeated for the moment.

"First I'll explain the tricks I've been doing here," Joe began.

"No, Joe," Dr. Wright said firmly. "Go back to the beginning. You were

on the battlefield. You were advancing against the enemy. Then?"

"Say!" Joe said in surprise. "You sound just like you know all about me."

"Perhaps I know more than you think," Dr. Wright said gently. "Was it a machine gun nest?"

"No," Joe said, his eyes going dreamy. "It was the new synchrotron mobile units. They had caught us by surprise in the middle of a charge. It was a trap, I guess. Our planes reported the retreat of the enemy from their forward emplacements, apparently abandoning them because we were so close. We were ordered to advance and occupy them. We were about two-thirds of the way over the open field when the tanks, lying in wait, simply moved out from under their camouflage and went into operation. Their electron beams were mowing everyone down along the entire line—except one guy that they missed. He was going forward all alone in his sector. I saw it coming. That pale pencil beam. It was jumping around so it couldn't miss. It was just a few feet away. It was cutting through the guy next to me."

"What happened then, Joe," Dr. Wright said softly, his words sounding overloud in the hush of the room. "Please try to remember *very carefully*. Every detail."

"Ha! Will I ever forget any of it!" Joe said lightly. "Maybe I closed my eyes. I don't know. I knew it was coming. I couldn't avoid it. I felt myself falling. I knew there wouldn't be any pain to it. I landed with my face in the dirt. I knew that a lot of them, when they got it from those beams, lived for as long as an hour or so afterward, fully conscious—depending

on where the beam cut them in two.

"As I said, I was falling. I landed with my face in the dirt. Then I turned over. I was in a dark place."

"Ah, yes," Dr. Wright said. "A dark place."

"A tank trap," Joe added. "About fifteen feet over my head I could see the hole where I had fallen through."

"You were still alive—*then*?" Madame Ona asked eerily.

"Yes," Joe said. "The he did a double take. 'What do you mean, then? I'm still alive!'"

"Are you?" Madame Ona asked very softly.

Joe's mother began to sob again, sitting very erect beside Madame Ona, and very alone.

"Are you?" Madame Ona repeated. This time it was a direct question rather than an implication of the opposite. It was a demanding question.

"Let me ask you a question, Joe," Dr. Wright said. "Did you come straight from that tank trap, as you thought it to be, to your home here—in the twinkling of an eye?"

"Why, ah," Joe hesitated.

"I presumed as much," Dr. Wright said smugly. "Doesn't that *tell* you something?"

"Let me tell you about the *genii*," Joe said. His voice sounded high and thin to his ears. "It was the *genii* that brought me here."

"The *genii*?" Dr. Wright said, frowning.

"Yes," Joe said. "It wasn't a *genii* at first. It was just a haze—a sort of transparent black haze formed by two electron beams coming together. I made it into a *genii* myself—" He stopped, realizing he was balling it all up so it sounded crazy.

"Ah, I see," Dr. Wright said. "The

powers of the mind to rationalize are remarkable—even in death!"

"So you don't believe the *genii* exists?" Joe said. "But it does!"

"What does it look like?" Mr. Chad asked from where he had been sitting quietly.

"It's ten or twelve feet high, and coal black, with a big white turban and an oriental costume on," Joe said. "But that's only when he's visible. He's been helping me with my tricks I've been playing this evening. You know, raising Freddy and George into the air and stuff." He turned to the two policemen. "The *genii* is probably what broke the windshield of your car."

The two policemen didn't answer. They were caught in the spell of the situation, drawn toward belief and drawing back from it.

"Let me suggest something to you, Joe," Dr. Wright said in a way that indicated he was picking his words carefully.

"Go ahead," Joe said.

"Don't consider what I'm going to say as being true, or even something I think to be true," Dr. Wright said slowly. "Just consider it in the light of—*acts*. I gather that you believe the *genii* brought you home?"

"Yes," Joe said. "Just like that." He snapped his finger.

"Let's suppose," Dr. Wright said. "that you didn't fall into a tank trap. Let's suppose that the pencil of energy from the synchrotron gun *did* cut you in two—kill you, and what you fell into what was a symbolic representation of death. That the *genii* is a similar invention of your mind to rationalize the powers that you yourself took in death, created so that your conscious thoughts could accept your

coming home instantly without having to accept the concomitant of your death."

"But it isn't so," Joe said. "It can't be so. Can it Margie?" he asked, turning to her. He saw the doubt in her mind and turned away from her.

"If it isn't so," one of the policemen said, "you're going to have to go down to the station with us and face the charge of desertion. If it is so, you'd better dematerialize pretty quick—or I'll take you down anyway." He chuckled uncomfortably.

"Yeah," Joe said, his shoulders sagging. "None of you believe me, and if I stay here I'm in plenty of trouble. I guess the only thing is to go back, the same way I came."

"Or go *on*," Madame Ona said hypnotically.

"Ha ha," Joe said dryly. "You pick the funniest friends, Mom." He looked at the inexorable purpose on the faces of the two policemen and realized this was *it*.

He went hesitantly at Margie, then impulsively pulled her out of her chair to her feet and kissed her.

"Take it easy while I'm gone, Baby," he murmured in her ear. He mussed her hair lovingly, then released her and went to his mother.

"Bye for now, Mom," he said, bending over and kissing her tear-dampened cheek. "Next time I come home it will be with the consent of the powers that be."

He straightened and grinned nervously at the three teen aged boys and the other two girls.

"I'm going back where I belong," he said. Then, directing his remark to Dr. Wright and Madame Ona, "and it isn't where you think I'm going either, because I'm not dead. And

just to give you something to chew on, I'll show you my genii."

He turned dramatically to the open center of the room and held out his hand.

"Materialize, genii," he said forcefully.

There was a puff of smoke. The genii, crouching low so as to get his huge bulk into the room, appeared, complete with turban and oriental dress.

"I am here, Master," his intensely black lips said, while the enormous, smoky eyes smiled at Joe.

"Take me back where I started from," Joe said.

The black presence enfolded Joe. He had a fleeting glimpse of the ring of blanched faces. Then, abruptly, he was standing on the roughly torn terrain of the battlefield, trucks loaded with supplies roaring past him on a newly constructed road.

The genii straightened, and stood with loose-sleeved arms folded, looking down at Joe.

"Now go back in that canteen and stay there until you are called out again," Joe ordered.

There was a swirl of dissolving mist that vanished into nothing.

"Hey, wait!" Joe exclaimed, remembering suddenly that his stainless steel canteen was half way around the world in the closest at home. Then he shrugged his shoulders. He could probably call up the genii from that distance as easily as from where he was.

Three days had passed, each taking an eternity—or so it seemed to Mrs. Ryan. There had been quite a time. Madame Ona had fainted after the genii had materialized so briefly and taken Joe with him. One of the policemen had become sick.

But finally everything had been taken care of, and she had been alone. Not quite alone. Margie had stayed with her overnight, herself heartbroken at the realization that Joe was dead. They had comforted each other through the sleepless night, avoiding the subject of where Joe might have been taken to by the dark giant.

The house was more empty than it had ever been, even when Mr. Ryan had died. Mrs. Ryan had opened the door to Joe's room once and looked at the things strewn around the room—and closed the door quickly, breaking into uncontrollable sobs.

That had been yesterday. Now she was washing the dishes from her solitary breakfast, the suds swishing around her wrists in a clean sort of way.

Suddenly the front doorbell started ringing.

"Oh dear," she said, wiping her hands on a towel. "Why does it always have to ring when my hands are wet?"

She hurried across the living room and opened the door. It was a Western Union man. He handed out a telegram and his book for her to sign.

Her eyes went unconsciously to the telegram as she signed. There was no black border around it this time. Who could it be from?

She closed the door, went back to the kitchen, and sat down in a chair near the window before starting to open it. Its contents were brief.

"This is to inform you," it read, "that your son, Joseph Ryan, has been found, and that he is alive and unharmed."

It was from the war department.

"Oh!" she said, her emotions all mixed up.

Crying happily she went to the phone and called Margie Blish and told her the good news. It wasn't understandable, but Joe was alive. He was in Europe where he couldn't be yet if he had been home—but he couldn't have come home if he was in Europe. Margie was crying happily when Mrs. Ryan hung up.

Now she started singing as she finished the dishes. Everything was all right again. In some unaccountable way she had been given the privilege of having her Joe home for two weeks right in the middle of the war.

An hour later she was opening the door to Joe's room. The disorder no longer struck into her heart painfully. Now it was a good pain, to see the disorder he had created.

She straightened things up, caressing each thing lovingly, putting it away carefully. It would have to stay where she put it until Joe came home for good.

There was a dirty pair of sox. She would wash them, so she tossed them into the hall outside. There were the magazines he had bought and read. Maybe he would want to keep them. She piled them neatly on one corner of the table in front of the window. There was a pair of shoes. She put them in the clothes closet. His bedroom slippers by the side of the bed went into the closet by the shoes. She took his pajamas off the hook on the inside of the closet door and tossed them into the hall with the dirty sox.

Her eyes fixed on the water canteen

setting on the dresser with its cap laying on the glass top beside it.

"I'll put that on the shelf in the closet," she decided, snapping its lid on tightly.

It was heavy as she picked it up. She paused.

"Maybe I should empty it and wash it out," she thought. Then, "No, I'll leave it just the way it is."

She got a chair and stood on it, and pushed the stainless steel, canvas covered canteen back against the wall where it couldn't be seen while standing on the floor.

Half an hour later she had forgotten about it completely.

It was two weeks later that the enemy began their systematic dusting with radio-actives that was to make land uninhabitable for centuries. They began in the Puget Sound area, and slowly advanced their operations toward Spokane and its surrounding towns including Moab.

Mrs. Ryan, along with her neighbors, was evacuated to east of the Rockies, and was given barely an hour to pack a few things to take with her.

A week later the dusting operation reached and passed her house.

The genii in its stainless steel bottle rested on the shelf in the closet, imprisoned beneath the cap that sealed it. It would be centuries before any living thing could come within miles of it.

It could wait.

The End

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SCIENCE FICTION CLASSICS

SPARTAN PLANET

CONCLUSION

Not since Eve had that trouble with the apple have women managed to cause so much trouble. For countless generations the Spartan heros had existed without seeing women—or even knowing of their existence. This situation was to change. . .drastically!

A . BERTRAM CHANDLER

Illustrated by JEFF JONES



Sparta — according to its own official history — is the home of the human race. The animals from which Man evolved are hermaphroditic creatures reproducing by fission — and Man himself, according to the biology text books, reproduced in the same way before the invention of the Birth Machine and the perfection of the technique by which the father's seed can be brought to maturity apart from his body. No longer hampered by the process of budding, men went ahead by leaps and bounds. Aristodemus, the first King of Sparta, organised and drilled his army and navy, subjugated the other City States and imposed the name of his capital upon the entire planet.

And there were — once again, according to the official histories — scientific advancements. The mechanical branch of the priesthood advanced from aeronautics to astronautics and, under Admiral Latterus, a star fleet was launched, its object being the colonisation of a nearby planet. But Latterus was ambitious, set up his own kingdom, and with him he had the only priests who knew the secret

of the interstellar drive. After many generations the people of Latterhaven revisited Sparta. A trade agreement was drawn up and signed, complying with which the Latterhaveneers sent two ships every Spartan year, bringing various manufactured goods in exchange for cargoes of the spices that grow only on Sparta.

Typical — when the story opens — of the military caste is Sergeant Brasidus, a member of the elite 'Police Battalion, the only branch of the Army trained in the use of firearms and mechanised equipment. His friend is Achron, a nurse at the Creche in which the babies produced by the Birth Machine are initially reared. Their relationship is — on a womanless world — a normal one.

Returning to the Police Barracks after a party Brasidus is told by the Duty Sergeant that he will be required to take charge of a Spaceport guard detail at 0600 hours that same morning. As neither Latterhaven Venus nor Latterhaven Hera is due he is rather puzzled by his orders, but concludes that one of the two space ships must



be making an unscheduled visit. On arrival at the Spaceport he reports to Captain Diomedes, the head of the Spartan Security Service. Diomedes tells him that the ship about to arrive is called Seeker III, but that he knows nothing about her apart from her unusual name. Brasidus cannot help thinking that Diomedes knows far more than he cares to admit.

Seeker III drops down from the morning sky — and almost as soon as she has landed six of the airships of the Spartan Air Navy take up station over the field — one of the first signs that the Council considers that the arrival of the strange space vessel could constitute a military emergency.

When the airlock door is opened and the ramp extended, two officers disembark. One, who says that his name is Lieutenant Commander John Grimes, the captain of the ship, is obviously human, in spite of his strange, stiff, concealing clothing. The other, Dr. Margaret Lazenby, is either humanoid or deformed; Brasidus' first impression is that he is some sort of exotic alien.

Grimes tells Diomedes that he is an officer of the Survey Service of the Interstellar Federation and that his mission is the taking of a Census in this sector of the Galaxy. He says, also, that the alien Lazenby is an Ethologist and would like to conduct her own survey of Sparta. Diomedes says that even though landing has been permitted nobody will be allowed to leave the immediate vicinity of the ship until the approval of the Council has been obtained, pointing out that the crews of even the two regular traders, Latterhaven Venus and Latterhaven Hera, are always confined to the spaceport limits.

At Grimes' invitation, Diomedes and Brasidus board Seeker III and are entertained in the captain's quarters, being served a strange luxury called coffee, brought in by a rating who obviously is a member of the same race as Margaret Lazenby. The two Spartans look at the three dimensional photographs adorning Grimes' cabin, among them a beach scene that the Lieutenant Commander tells them was taken on a world called Arcadia whose people are enthusiastic naturists. Roughly half of those on the beach are normal humans and the others, in their state of undress, exhibit malformations and deficiencies. Grimes admits that Margaret Lazenby is a native of Arcadia. A world of that name has no existence, of course, in any of the official histories, neither has the Interstellar Federation. The only possible conclusion is that the Latterhaveneers have been pushing further and further afield, using their own Birth Machines to build up human population on colonised planets, absorbing non-human races such as the Arcadians into their empire.

Back in Diomedes' office, the Security Captain tells Brasidus that he is arranging the latter's transfer from the Military Police to the Security Service but that he will still retain his old position and rank as a cover. He tells him, too, that one of his duties will be to make investigations in and around the Creche, and that his friendship with Achron will justify frequent visits to that building. That night Brasidus accompanies the nurse on his tour of duty and takes advantage of a feeding time uproar in the ward to wander into those parts of the building off-limits to all but Doctors. There he spies upon a meet-

ing between Dr. Heraklion and a being called Sally, who has all the physical characteristics of an Arcadian. In conversation with the Doctor Sally refers to the Arcadians in the Creche as *hetirae* — a word strange to Brasidus.

The following day Brasidus is told by Diomedes to escort Grimes and Margaret Lazenby to an audience with King Cresphontes and the assembled Council. On the drive from the spaceport to the city, Margaret Lazenby sits between Grimes and Brasidus — and Brasidus is strongly disturbed by the alien's physical proximity. He is disturbed also by Margaret Lazenby's conversation "... What a beautiful history ... Carefully tailored to fit the facts. Tell me, Brasidus, did you ever hear of the Third Expansion, or of Captain John Latter, Master of the early time-jammer Utah? Come to that, did you ever hear of the First Expansion?" And ... "Look at those houses! With architecture like that there should be real chariots escorting us, not these hunks of animated ironmongery. Still, apart from his sidearms, Brasidus is dressed properly ..."

At the audience the King and the Council — with one exception — seem disposed to accept Seeker III and her people at their face value. The exception is a Dr. Pausanius — who makes it obvious that he knows far too much about Arcadians. He succeeds only in annoying King Cresphontes and, to the ill-concealed horror of both Grimes and Margaret Lazenby, is taken out to be executed. Brasidus tells Grimes that the Doctor was lucky rather than otherwise; instead of suffering a relatively painless death he could have had his arms and legs

lopped off and been exposed on the hillside with the next batch of malformed or subnormal children produced by the Birth Machine.

Brasidus makes his report to Captain Diomedes, and is told that his next duty will be the investigation of the Andronicus Warehouse, the building to which the mysterious cargoes brought by Latterhaven Venus and Latterhaven Hera are always delivered. Disguised as a helot of the labouring class he is one of the work team under the direction of Alessis, a refrigeration engineer. The job is the annual overhaul of the Deep Freeze equipment in the warehouse. Alessis, who is himself working for Diomedes, shows Brasidus a tunnel that runs from the warehouse to the Creche.

Before he can make any real investigation of the extensive living quarters he is discovered by what seems to be yet another Arcadian. But the being is friendly rather than hostile. Unnatural, thinks Brasidus, after the first kiss. Unnatural, to mate with a monster from another world, even to contemplate such a sterile coupling. Unnatural, unnatural ...

But it is beginning to feel far more natural than otherwise when the Arcadian breaks away from him as there is the sound of somebody approaching along the corridor, hustling him back into the tunnel.

In the Deep Freeze chamber Alessis looks at him curiously. "Have you been in a fight? Your mouth. There's blood."

Brasidus examines the back of his investigatory hand. "No," he says. "It's not blood. I don't know what it is. . ."

Chapter 14

"So it was not the same one that you saw before?" asked Diomedes.

"No, Captain. At least, I don't think so. Her voice was different."

"H'm. There must be an absolute nest of Arcadians in that bloody Creche . . . And all . . . she did was to talk to you, and warn you to make yourself scarce before any of the Doctors came on the scene?"

"That was all, Captain."

"You're lying, Brasidus."

"All right." Brasidus' voice was sullenly defiant. "I kissed him, her, it. And it - or she - kissed me back."

"You *what*?"

"You heard me, sir. Your very vague instructions to me were that I should find out all that I could. And that was one way of doing it."

"Indeed? And what did you find out?"

"That these Arcadians, as you have said, exercise a sort of hypnotic power, especially when there is physical contact."

"Hypnotic power? So the touch of mouth to mouth almost put you to sleep?"

"That wasn't the way I meant it, sir. But I did feel that if I weren't very careful I should be doing just what she wanted."

"And what did she want?"

"Do I have to spell it out for you, sir? Oh, I know that intercourse with an alien being must be *wrong* - but that was what she wanted."

"And you?"

"All right. I wanted it too."

"Brasidus, Brasidus . . . You know that what you have just told me could get you busted down to helot. Or worse. But in *our* job, as you are learning, we often have to break the

Law in order to enforce it."

"As a policeman, sir, I am reasonably familiar with the Law. I cannot recall that it forbids intercourse with aliens."

"Not yet, Brasidus. Not yet. But you will recall that contact with the crews of visiting ships is prohibited. And I think that the preliminaries to making love may be construed as contact."

"But are these Arcadians in the Creche crew members of visiting ships?"

"What else can they be? They must have got here somehow." Diomedes looked long and hard at Brasidus, but there was no censure in his regard. "However, I am not displeased by the way in which things are turning out. You are getting to know something about these . . . *things*. These Arcadians. And I think that you are strong enough to resist their lure. . . Now, what have we for you? This evening, I think, you will visit your friend Achron at the Creche. Keep your eyes and ears open, but don't stick your neck out. Tomorrow I have an assignment for you that you should find interesting. This Margaret Lazenby wishes to make a sight-seeing trip, and she especially asked for you as her escort."

"Will Lieutenant Commander Grimes be along, sir?"

"No. He'll be consorting with the top brass. After all, he *is* the captain of *seeker* and, to use spaceman's parlance, seems to pile on rather more Gs than the Master of a n. chantman . . . Yes, Brasidus, have yourself a nice visit with your boyfriend, and then report to me here tomorrow morning at 0730 hours, washed behind the ears and with all your brasswork polished."

Brasidus spent the evening with Achron before the latter reported for duty. It was not the first time that he had been a guest at the nurse's Club—but it was the first time that he had felt uncomfortable there. Apart from his own feelings, it was no different from other occasions. There were the usual graceful, softly spoken young men, proud and happy to play host to the hoplites who were their visitors. There was the usual food—far better cooked and more subtly seasoned than that served in the army messes. There was the usual wine—a little too sweet, perhaps, but chilled and sparkling. There was music and there was dancing — not the strident screaming of brass and the boom and rattle of drums, not the heavy thud of bare feet on the floor, but the rhythmic strumming of lutes and, to it, the slow gyrations of willowy bodies.

But . . .

But there was something lacking.

But what could be lacking?

But it was only a substitute.

A substitute for *what*?

"You are very thoughtful tonight, Brasidus," remarked Achron wistfully.

"Am I?"

"Yes. You . . . You're not with us, somehow."

"No?"

"Brasidus, I have to be on duty soon. Will you come with me to my room?"

The Sergeant looked at his friend. Achron was a pretty boy, prettier than most, but he was not, he could never be, an Arcadian . . .

What am I thinking? he asked himself, shocked. *Why am I thinking it?*

He said, "Not tonight, Achron."

"But what is wrong with you, Brasidus? You never used to be like this." Then, with a sort of incredulous bitterness, "It can't be one of the men from the ship, can it? No, not possibly. Not one of those great, hairy brutes. As well consort with one of those malformed aliens they've brought with them." Achron laughed at the absurdity of the idea.

"No," Brasidus told him. "Not one of the men from the ship."

"Then it's all right then."

"Yes, it's all right. But I shall have a heavy day tomorrow."

"You poor dear. I suppose that the arrival of this absurd spaceship from some uncivilized world has thrown a lot of extra work on you."

"Yes. It has."

"But you'll walk with me to the Creche, won't you?"

"Yes. I'll do that."

"Oh, thank you. You can wait here while I get changed. There's plenty of wine left."

Yes, there was plenty of wine left, but Brasidus was in no mood for it. He sat in silence, watching the dancers, listening to the slow, sensuous thrumming. Did the Arcadians dance? And how would *they* look dancing, stripped for the performance, the light gleaming on their smooth, golden skins? And why should the mere thought of it be so evocative of sensual imaginings?

Achron came back into the hall, dressed in his white working tunic. Brasidus got up from the bench, walked with him out into the night. The two friends made their way through the streets in silence at first — but it was not the companionable silence to which they had become used. Finally Brasidus spoke, trying to keep any display of

real interest out of his voice.

"Wouldn't it be better if you nurses lived in the Creche? The same as we do in the Barracks . . ."

"Then we couldn't have these walks, Brasidus."

"You could visit me."

"But I don't *like* your Barracks. And your Club's as bad."

"I suppose that the cooking could be improved in both. Just who *does* live in at the Creche?"

"All the Doctors, of course. And there are some Engineers who look after the machinery."

"No helots?"

"No. Of course not." Achron was shocked at the idea. "Even *we* — but, after all, Brasidus, we are helots — have to live outside. But you know all that. Why are you asking me?"

That was a hard counter question to answer. At last Brasidus said, "There have been rumours . . ."

"Rumours of what?"

"Well, it's a very large building. Even allowing for the wards and the Birth Machine, there must be ample space inside. Do you think that the staff Doctors and Engineers could have . . . friends living with them?"

It was Achron's turn to hesitate. "You could be right, Brasidus. There are so many rules telling us that we must not stray away from our wards. Now that you raise the point, I can see that there has always been an atmosphere of . . . of secrecy . . ."

"And have you ever seen or heard anything?"

"No."

"And do the staff Doctors and Engineers have any friends among the nurses?"

"They wouldn't look at *us*." Resentment was all too evident in Achron's

voice. "They're too high and mighty. Keep themselves to themselves, that's what *they* do. And their own accommodation, I've heard, the King himself might envy. They've a heated swimming pool, even. I've never seen it, but I've heard about it. And I've seen the food and the wine that come in. Oh, they do themselves well — far better than us, who do all the work."

"There might be enquiries being made," said Brasidus cautiously.

"There are always enquiries being made. That Captain Diomedes wanted me to work for him. But he's not... he's not a gentleman. We didn't get on. Why should I help him?"

"Would you help *me*?"

"And how can I, Brasidus?"

"Just look and listen. Let me know of anything out of the ordinary in the Creche."

"But the Doctors can do no wrong," said Achron. "And even if they *did*, they *couldn't*. You know what I mean."

"In your eyes, you mean?"

"In my eyes," admitted the nurse.

"But for you, and only for you, I'll . . . I'll look and listen. Does it mean promotion for you?"

"It does," said Brasidus.

"Are you coming in?" asked Achron as they reached the entrance to the Creche.

"No. I shall have a long and wearing day tomorrow."

"You . . . you don't give me much inducement to help you, do you? If I do, will things be the same between us again?"

"Yes," lied Brasidus.

Chapter 15

Brasidus drove out to the spaceport in the car that had been placed at

his disposal. He realised that he was looking forward to what he had told Achron would be a long and wearing day. He enjoyed the freshness of the morning air, looked up with appreciation at the Spartan Navy still, in perfect formation, circling the landing field. But now he did not, as he had done so many times in the past, envy the airmen. He was better off as he was. If he were up there, a crew member of one of the warships, even the captain of one of them, he would not be meeting the glamorous, exotic spacefarers — and most certainly would not, in the course of duty, be spending the entire day with one of them.

Margaret Lazenby was already ashore, was waiting in Diomedes' office, was engaged in conversation with the Security Captain. Brasidus heard his superior say, "I'm sorry. Dr. Lazenby, but I cannot allow you to carry weapons. The cameras and recording equipment — yes. But not that pistol. Laser, isn't it?"

"It is. But damn it all, Diomedes — on this cockeyed world of yours my going about unarmed degrades me to the status of a helot."

"And the Arcadians are not helots?"

"No. It should be obvious — even to a security officer. Would a helot hold commissioned rank in the Federation's Survey Service?"

"Then if you possess warrior's status, your being let loose with a weapon of unknown potentialities is even worse insofar as we are concerned." The fat man, facing Margaret Lazenby's glare with equanimity, allowed himself to relent. "All right. Leave your pistol here, and I'll issue you with a stun gun."

"I shall not leave my weapon *here*.

Will you be so good as to put me through to the ship so that I can tell the Duty Officer to send somebody ashore to pick it up?"

"All right." Diomedes punched a few buttons on his board, picked up the handset, spoke into it briefly, then handed it to the Arcadian. He turned to Brasidus. "So you've arrived. Attention!" Brasidus obeyed with a military crash and jangle. "Let's look at you. H'm, brass not too bad, but your leatherwork could do with another polish . . . But you're not going anywhere near the Palace, so I don't suppose it matters. At ease! Stand easy! In fact — relax."

Meanwhile, Margaret Lazenby had finished speaking into the telephone. She returned the instrument to its rest. She stood there, looking down at the obese Diomedes sprawled in his chair — and Brasidus looked at her. She was not in uniform, but was wearing an open-necked shirt with a flaring collar cut from some soft, brown material, and below it a short kilt of the same colour. Her legs were bare, and her slim feet were thrust into serviceable looking sandals. At her belt was a holstered weapon of unfamiliar design. The cross straps from which depended her equipment — camera, sound recorder, binoculars — accentuated the outthrusting fleshy mounds on her chest that betrayed her alien nature.

She was, obviously, annoyed — and when she spoke it was equally obvious that she was ready and willing to transfer her annoyance to Brasidus. "Well, Brasidus," she demanded. "Seen enough? Or would you like me to go into a song and dance routine for you?"

"I . . . I was interested in that

weapon of yours . . .

"Is *that* all?" For some obscure reason Brasidus' reply seemed to annoy her still further. And then a junior officer from *Seeker* came in, and Margaret Lazenby unbuckled the holstered pistol from her belt, handed it to the young spaceman. She accepted the stun gun from Diomedes, unholstered it, looked at it curiously. "Safety catch? Yes. Firing stud? H'm. We have similar weapons. Non-lethal, but effective enough. Oh, range?"

"Fifty feet," said Diomedes.

"Not very good. Better than nothing, I suppose." She clipped the weapon to her belt. "Come on, Brasidus, We'd better get out of here before he has me stripped to a pea-shooter and you polishing your belt and sandals."

"Your instructions, sir?" Brasidus asked Diomedes.

"Instructions? Oh, yes. Just act as guide and escort to Dr. Lazenby. Show her what you can of the workings of our economy — fields, factories . . . You know. Answer her questions as long as there's no breach of security involved. And keep your own ears flapping."

"Very good, sir. Oh, expenses . . ."

"Expenses, Brasidus?"

"There may be meals, an occasional drink . . ."

Diomedes sighed, pulled a bag of coins out of a drawer, dropped it with a clank on the desk. "I know just how much is in this — and I shall expect a detailed account of what you spend. Off with you. And, Dr. Lazenby, I expect you to bring Brasidus, here, back in good order and condition."

Brasidus saluted, then followed the spaceman out through the doorway.

She said, as soon as they were outside the building, "Expenses?"

"Yes, Doctor . . ."

"Call me Peggy."

"I have rations for the day in the car, Peggy, but I didn't think they were . . . suitable. Just bread and cold meat and a flagon of wine from the Mess at the Barracks . . ."

"And so . . . And so you want to impress me with something better?"

"Why, yes," admitted Brasidus with a certain surprise. (And it was strange, too, that he was looking forward to buying food and drink for this alien, even though the wherewithal to do so came out of the public purse. On Sparta every man was supposed to pay for his own entertainment — although not always in cash. In this case, obviously, there could be no reciprocation. *Or could there be?* But it did not matter.)

And then, with even greater surprise, Brasidus realised that he was helping Margaret Lazenby to the hovercar. Even burdened as she was she did not need his assistance, but she accepted it as her due. Brasidus climbed in after her, took his seat behind the control column. "Where to?" he asked.

"That's up to you. I'd like a good run-around. No, not the city — I shall be seeing plenty of that when I accompany John — Commander Grimes — on his official calls. What about the countryside, and the outlying villages? Will that be in order?"

"It will, Peggy," Brasidus said. (And why should the use of that name be so pleasurable?)

"And if you'll explain things to me as you drive . . ."

The car lifted on its air cushion in a flurry of dust, moved forward,

out through the main gateway, and for the first few miles headed toward the city.

"The spice fields," explained Brasi-
dus with a wave of his hand. "It'll
soon be harvest time — and then the
two ships from Latterhaven will call
for the crop."

"Rather . . . overpowering. The
smell, I mean. Cinnamon, nutmeg,
almond, but more so . . . And a sort
of mixture of sage and onion and gar-
lic. . . But those men working in the
fields with hoes and rakes . . . Don't
you have mechanical cultivators?"

"But why should we? I suppose
that machines could be devised — but
such mechanical tools would throw
the helots out of employment."

"But you'd enjoy vastly increased
production, and would be able to
afford a greater tonnage of imports
from Latterhaven."

"But we are already self-sufficient."

"Then what *do* you import from
Latterhaven?"

Brasidus creased his brows. "I . . .
I don't know, Peggy," he admitted.
"We are told that the ships bring
manufactured goods . . ."

"Such as?"

"I don't know." Then he recalled
the strange book that he had seen
in the Creche. "Books, perhaps. . ."

"What sort of books?"

"I don't know, Peggy. The Doctors
keep them for themselves. But we turn
off here. We detour the city and run
through the vineyards."

The road that they were now fol-
lowing was little more than a track,
running over and around the foothills,
winding through the terraced vineyards
on either side. As far as the eye could
see the trellises were sagging under
the weight of the great, golden fruit,

each at least the size of a man's
head, the broad, fleshy leaves. Brasi-
bus remarked, "This has been a good
year for grapes."

"*Grapes?* Are those things grapes?"

"What else could they be?" Brasi-
dus stopped the car, got out, scram-
bled up the slope to the nearest vine.
With his knife he hacked through a
tough stem, then carried the ripe,
glowing sphere back to Peggy. She
took it, hefted it in her two hands,
peered at it closely, sniffed it. "What-
ever this is," she declared, it ain't
no grape — not even a grapefruit.
Something indigenous, I suppose. Is it
edible?"

"No. It has to be . . . processed.
Skinned, trodden on, exposed to the
air in open vats . . . It takes a long
time — but it gets rid of the poison."

"Poison? I'll take your word for
it." She handed the fruit back to
Brasidus, who threw it on to the bank.
"Oh, I should have kept that, to take
to the ship for analysis . . ."

"I'll get it again for you."

"Don't bother. Let the Bio-Chemist
do his own fetching and carrying.
But have you any of the . . . the
finished product? You did say that you
had brought a flagon of wine with
you."

"Yes, Peggy." Brasidus reached into
the back of the car, brought up the
stone jug, pulled on the wooden stop-
per.

"No glasses?" she asked with a lift
of the eyebrows.

"Glasses?"

"Cups, goblets, mugs . . . Things
you drink out of."

"I . . . I'm sorry. I never thought..."

"You have a lot to learn, my dear.
But show me how *you* manage when
you haven't any women around to

exercise a civilizing influence."

"Women?"

"People like me. Go on, show me."

Brasidus grinned, lifted the flagon in his two hands, tilted it over his open mouth, clear of his lips. The wine was rough, tart rather than sweet, but refreshing. He gulped happily, then returned the jug to an upright position. He swallowed, then said, "Your turn, Peggy."

"You can't expect me to drink like that. You'll have to help me."

You wouldn't last five minutes on Sparta, though Brasidus — not altogether derisively. He turned around in his seat, carefully elevated the wine flagon over Peggy's upturned face. He was suddenly very conscious of her red, parted lips, her white teeth. He tilted, allowing a thin trickle of the pale yellow fluid to emerge. She coughed and spluttered, shook her head violently. Then she gasped, "Haven't the knack of it — although I can manage a Spanish wine skin again."

And now it was Brasidus who had to be careful, very careful. He was acutely aware of the physical proximity of her, the firm softness of her. "Ready?" he asked shakily.

"Yes. Fire at will."

This time the attempt was more successful. When at last she held up her hand to signal that she had had enough she must have disposed of at least a third of the flagon. From a pocket in her skirt she pulled a little square of white cloth, wiped her chin and dabbed her lips with it. "That's not a bad dollop of plonk," she stated. "Sort of dry sherry and ginger . . . But more-ish. No — that's enough. Didn't you ever hear the saying — 'Candy is dandy, but lick-er is quicker'?"

"What is candy?" asked Brasidus.

"And lick-er is quicker for what?"

"Sorry. Ducks. I was forgetting that you have yet to learn the facts of life. Come to that — there's quite a few facts of life that I have to learn about this peculiar fatherland of yours. What is home without a mother?" She laughed. "Of course, you're lucky. You don't know *how* lucky. A pseudo-Hellenic culture — and nary an Oedipus complex among the whole damn' boiling of you!"

"Peggy, please speak Greek."

"Speak English, you mean. But I was using words and phrases that have dropped out of your version of our common tongue." She had slipped a little tablet into her mouth from a tube that she had extracted from her pocket. Suddenly her enunciation was less slurred. "Sorry, Brasidus, but this local tippie of yours is rather potent. Just as well that I brought along some soberer-uppers."

"But why do you need them? Surely one of the pleasures of drinking — *the* pleasure of drinking — is the effect. The . . . The loosening up. . ."

"And the drunken brawl?"

"Yes," he said firmly.

"You mean that you'd like to . . . to brawl with me?"

Brasidus glimpsed a vivid, mental picture of such an encounter and, with no hesitation, said, once again, "Yes."

"Drive on," she told him.

Chapter 16

They drove on, through and over the foothills, always climbing, the snow-capped peak of Olympus over ahead, until, at last, Brasidus brought the car to a halt in the single street of a tiny village that clung preca-

riously to the mountainside.

"Kilkis," he announced. "The tavern here could be worse. We halt here for our midday meal."

"Kilkis . . ." The Arcadian repeated the name, gazed around her at the huddle of low but not ungraceful buildings, and then to the boulder-strewn slopes upon which grazed flocks of slow-moving, dun-colored beasts, many of them almost ready to reproduce by fission. "Kilkis . . ." she repeated. "And how do the people here make a living? Do they take in each other's washing?"

"I don't understand, Peggy."

"Sorry, Brasidus. What are those animals?"

"Goats," he explained. "The major source of our meat supply." He went on, happy to be upon more familiar ground, "The only helots allowed to carry arms are the goatherds — see, there's one by that rock. He has a horn to summon assistance, and a sword, and a spear . . ."

"Odd looking goats. And why the weapons? Against rustlers?"

"*Rustlers?*"

"Cattle thieves. Or goat thieves."

"No. Goat raiding is classed as a military operation — and, in any case, none of the other City states would dare to violate *our* borders. We have the Navy, of course, and firearms and armoured chariots. They do not. But there're still the wolves, Peggy — and they're no respecters of frontiers."

"H'm. Then I think that you should allow your goatherds to carry at least a rifle. Is it a hazardous occupation?"

"It is, rather. But the Schools maintain a steady flow of replacements—mainly from among those who have

just failed to make the grade as hoplites."

"I see. Failed soldiers rather than passed veterinarians . . ."

They got out of the car and walked slowly into the inn, into the long room with its rush-strewn floor, its tables and benches, its low, raftered ceiling, its not unpleasant smell of sour wine and cookery. At one end of the room there was an open fire, upon which simmered a huge iron cauldron. The half dozen or so customers — rough-looking fellows, leather-clad, wiry rather than muscular—got slowly to their feet at the sight of Brasidus' uniform, made reluctant and surly salutation. And then, as they got a proper look at his companion, there was more than a flicker of interest on their dark, seamed faces.

"You may be seated," Brasidus told them curtly.

"Thank you, Sergeant," replied one of them, his voice only just short of open insolence.

The taverner — fat, greasy, obsequious — waddled from the back of the room. "Your pleasure, Lords?" he asked.

"A flagon of your best wine. And," added Brasidus, "two of your finest goblets to drink it from. What have you to eat?"

"Only the stew, Lord. But it is made from a fine, fat young goat, just this very morning cast off from its father. Or we have sausage — well-ripened and well-seasoned. . ."

"Peggy?" said Brasidus, with an interrogative intonation.

"The stew will do very nicely, I think. It smells good. And it's been boiled, so it should be safer . . ."

The innkeeper stared at her. "And may I be so impertinent as to enquire

if the Lord is from the strange spaceship?"

"You've already done so," Margaret Lazenby told him, then relented.

"Yes. I am from the ship."

"You must find our world very beautiful, Lord."

"Yes. It is beautiful. And interesting."

Roughly, Brasidus pulled out a bench from a vacant table, almost forced Peggy down to the seat. "What about that wine?" he growled to the innkeeper.

"Yes, Lord. Coming, Lord. At once."

One of the goatherds whispered something to his companions, then chuckled softly. Brasidus glared at the men, ostentatiously loosened the flap of the holster of his projectile pistol. There was an uneasy silence — and then, one by one, the goatherds rose to their feet and slouched out of the room. The Arcadian complained, "I had my recorder going." She did something to the controls of one of the instruments slung at her side. An amplified voice said loudly, "Since when has the Army been playing nurse to offworld monsters?"

"Insolent swine!"

"Don't be silly. They're entitled to their opinions."

"They're not. They insulted me." Then, as an afterthought, "And you."

"I've been called worse things than 'offworld monster' in my time. And you've ruined their lunchtime session — to say nothing of my chances of making a record of a typical pub conversation . . ."

Reluctantly, "I'm sorry."

"So you bloody well should be."

The innkeeper arrived with the flagon and the two goblets. They were

mismatched, and they could have been cleaner, but they were of glass, not of earthenware or metal, and of a standard surprising in an establishment such as this. He placed them carefully on the rough surface of the table then stood there, wine jug in hand, awaiting the word to pour.

"Just a minute," Margaret Lazenby said. She picked up one of the drinking vessels, examined it. "H'm. Just as I thought . . ."

"And what did you think, Peggy?"

"Look," she said, and her pointed, polished fingernail traced the design of the crest etched into the surface of the glass. "A stylized Greek helmet. . . And under it, easy enough to read after all these years, *I.T.T.S. DORIC*"

"I.T.T.S. . . ?"

"Interstellar Transport Commission's Ship."

"But I thought that your ship belonged to the Interstellar Federation's Survey Service."

"She does."

"But apart from the Latterhaven freighters, no ship but yours has ever called here."

"Somebody must have done. But what about getting these . . . these antiques filled?"

Brasidus gestured to the innkeeper who, after a second's hesitation, filled the Arcadians glass first. One did not have to be a telepath to appreciate the man's indecision. Here was a Sergeant — and a sergeant in the Police Branch of the Army at that. Here was an alien, in what might be uniform and what might be civilian clothing. Who ranked whom?

Brasidus lifted his goblet. "To your good health, Peggy."

"And to yours." She sipped. "H'm. Not bad at all. Of course, in this

setting it should be *retsina*, and there should be *feta* and black olives to nibble . . ."

"You will speak in riddles, Peggy."

"I'm sorry, Brasidus. It's just that you're so . . . so human in spite of everything that I keep forgetting that your world has been in isolation for centuries. But suppose we just enjoy the meal?"

And they did enjoy it. Brasidus realised that his own appreciation of it was enhanced by the Arcadian's obvious delight in the — to her — unfamiliar food and drink. They finished their stew, and then there were ripe, red-gleaming apples — "Like no apples that I've ever seen or tasted," commented Peggy, "but they'll do. Indeed they will. . ." — and another flagon of wine. When they were done, save for the liquor remaining in the jug, Brasidus wiped his mouth on the back of his right hand, watched with tolerant amusement as his companion patted her lips with a little square of white cloth that she brought from one of her pockets.

She said, "That was *good*, Brasidus." From a pocket that she produced from a shoulder pouch she half shook two slim brown cylinders. "Smoke?"

"Is this the same stuff that Commander Grimes was burning in that wooden thing like a little trumpet?"

"It is. Yours must be about the only Man-colonised world that hasn't tobacco. Commander Grimes likes his pipe; I prefer a cigarillo. See — this is the striking end. Just a tap — so. Put the other end in your mouth. . ." She showed him how, then remarked, as she exhaled a fragrant blue cloud, "I hope that the same doesn't happen

to us as happened to Sir Walter Raleigh . . ."

"And what did happen?" Brasidus inhaled, then coughed and spluttered violently. He hastily dropped the little cylinder on to his plate. Probably this Sir Walter Raleigh, whoever he was, had been violently ill.

"Sir Walter Raleigh was the Elizabethan explorer who first introduced tobacco into a country called England. He was enjoying his pipe after a meal in an inn, and the innkeeper thought that he was on fire and doused him with a bucket of water . . ."

"This fat flunkey had better not try it on you!" growled Brasidus.

"I doubt if he'd dare. From what I've observed, a Sergeant on this planet piles on more Gs than a mere Knight in the days of Good Queen Bess." She laughed through the wreathing, aromatic fumes — then, suddenly serious, said, "We have company."

Brasidus swung round, his right hand on the butt of his pistol. But it was only the Village Corporal — a big man in slovenly uniform, his leather unpolished, his brass tarnished. His build, his broad, heavy face, were indicative of slowness, both physical and mental — but the little grey eyes under the sandy thatch of the eyebrows were shrewd enough.

"Sergeant!" he barked, saluting and stiffening to attention.

"Corporal — at ease! Be seated."

"Thank you, Sergeant."

"Some wine, Corporal?"

The corporal reached out a long arm to one of the other tables, grabbed an earthenware mug, filled it from the flagon. "Thank you, Sergeant. Your health, Sergeant. And yours, sir." He drank deeply and noisily.

"Ah, that was good. But, Sergeant, my apologies. I should have been on hand to welcome you and . . ." he stared curiously at the Arcadian. "You and your . . . guest?"

"Dr. Lazenby is one of the officers of the starship *Seeker*."

"I thought that, Sergeant. Even here there are stories . . ." The man, Brasidus realised, was staring at those odd mounds of flesh that were very obvious beneath the thin shirt worn by the alien.

"They aren't concealed weapons," remarked the Arcadian wryly. "And, in the proper circumstances, they are quite functional."

The corporal flushed, looked away and addressed himself to his superior. "I was absent from the village, Sergeant, as today is Exposure Day. I had to supervise. But as soon as I was told of your arrival I hastened back."

"Exposure Day?" asked Margaret Lazenby sharply.

"Yes," Brasidus told her. "One of the days on which the newly born—those newly born who are sickly or deformed, that is—are exposed on the mountainside . . ."

"*And what happens to them?*"

"Usually the wolves finish them off. But without food or water they'd not last long."

"You're joking." It was an appeal rather than a statement or question.

"But why should I joke, Peggy? The purity of the race must be maintained."

She turned to the corporal, her face white, her eyes blazing. "You. Had the wolves come when you left the . . . the Exposure?"

"No, sir. But they're never long

in hearing the cries and winding the scent."

She was on her feet, pushing her bench away so violently that it toppled with a crash. "Get a move on, Brasidus. If we hurry we may still be in time."

Brasidus was sickened by her reactions, by her words. Exposure was necessary—but it was not something to take a picture of, to make records of. As well join the scavengers in their filth-eating rounds of the city streets.

"Come on!" she flared.

"No," he said stubbornly. "I'll not help you to make a film that you and your shipmates can float over . . ."

"Make a film?" Her voice was incredulous. "You fool. We may be in time to save them."

And then it was Brasidus' turn to experience a wave of incredulity.

Chapter 17

"No," said Brasidus.

"Yes," she contradicted him. But, incongruously, it was not the borrowed pistol that she was levelling at the two men, but a camera. Brasidus laughed—and then the slim hands holding the seemingly innocuous instrument twitched ever so slightly, and from the lens came an almost invisible flicker of light and, behind the policeman, something exploded. There was a sudden acrid stench of flash-boiled wine, of burning wood.

That deadly lens was looking straight at Brasidus again.

"Laser. . ." he muttered.

"Laser," she stated.

"But . . . But you were supposed to leave all your weapons behind . . ."

"I'm not altogether a fool, duckie. And, oddly enough, this is a camera, with flash attachment. Not a very

good one — but multi-purpose tools are rarely satisfactory. Now, are you going to drive me out to the Exposure?"

She'll have to bring along the corporal, thought Brasidus. *And the two of us should be able to deal with her...*

And now the deadly camera was in her left hand only, and the borrowed stun gun was out of its holster. She fired left-handed, and at this short range she could hardly miss. The corporal gasped, made one tottering step forward, then crashed untidily to the floor. The belled muzzle swung slightly and she fired again. There was the sound of another heavy fall behind Brasidus. That, he guessed, would be the innkeeper. There would be no telephone calls made to the City for several hours. The goatherds were notorious for their reluctance to assist the forces of law and order.

"Get into the car," she said. "I'll ride behind. And make it snappy."

He walked out of the inn, into the afternoon sunlight, deliberately not hurrying. He consoled himself with the thought that, even though he was falling down on the job as a Sergeant of Police, he was earning his keep as a Lieutenant of Security. He had been told to find out what made these aliens tick — and he was finding out. In any case, if the wolf packs were as ravenous as usual, there would be nothing left but a scatter of well-gnawed bones.

He climbed into the driver's seat, thought briefly about making a dash for it, then thought better of it. He could never get out of range in time. He heard her clambering in behind him. He wished that he knew what way that so-called camera was pointing — and then succeeded in catch-

ing a glimpse of it in the rear mirror. If the firing stud were accidentally pressed it would drill a neat, cauterized hole through his head. Or would the water content of his brains explode? In that case it would not be so tidy.

"Get going," she said. And then, as an afterthought, "I suppose you know the way."

"I know the way," he admitted. The car lifted on its air cushion and proceeded.

"Faster. Faster."

"This is only a goat track," he grumbled. "And this isn't an armoured chariot we're riding in."

Even so, deliberately taking the risk of fouling the fan casings on projecting stones, he managed to increase speed. Rather to his disappointment the vehicle still rode easily, sped over the rough terrain without making any crippling contacts.

And then, ahead of them, seemingly from just over the next rise, sounded the ominous howling and snarling of the wolf pack — and with it, almost inaudible, a thin, high screaming.

"Hurry!" Margaret Lazenby was shouting. "Hurry!"

They were over the rise now. Once before Brasidus had watched an Exposure, and the spectacle had sickened him, even though he had realised the necessity for it, and appreciated the essential justice of allowing Nature to erase its own mistakes in its own way. But to rescue one or more of these mewling, sub-human creatures That was unthinkable.

The car was over the rise and bearing down on the snarling, quarrelling pack, on the carnivores too engrossed in their bloody business to notice the approach of potential ene-

mies. But perhaps they heard the whine of the ducted fans and, even so, remembered that on these occasions Men never interfered with them.

The car was sweeping down the slope towards the melee, and Margaret Lazenby was firing. Brasidus could feel the heat of the discharges, cursed as the hair on the right side of his head crisped and smouldered. But he maintained a steady course nonetheless — and experienced the inevitable thrill of the hunt, the psychological legacy from Man's savage ancestors. Ahead there was a haze of vapourised blood; the stench of seared flesh was already evident. The howling of the pack rose to a frenzied crescendo but the animals stood their ground, red eyes glaring, slavering, crimson-dripping jaws agape. Then — an evil, grey, stormy tide — they began to surge up the hillside to meet their attackers.

Brasidus was shooting now, the control column grasped in his left hand, the bucking projectile pistol in his right. Between them, he and Margaret Lazenby cleared a path for their advance, although the car rocked and lurched as it passed over the huddle of dead and dying bodies. Then — "Stop!" she was crying. "Stop! There's a baby there! I saw it move!"

Yes, there, among the ghastly litter of scattered bones and torn flesh was a living child, eyes screwed tight-shut, bawling mouth wide open. It would not be living much longer. Already two of the wolves, ignoring the slaughter of their companions, were facing each other over the tiny, feebly struggling body, their dreadful teeth bared as they snarled at each other.

Margaret Lazenby was out of the car

before Brasidus could bring it to a halt. Inevitably she lost her balance and fell, rolling down the slope, almost to where the two carnivores were disputing their prey. She struggled somehow to her knees just as they saw her, just as they abandoned what was no more than a toothsome morsel for a satisfying meal. Somehow, awkwardly, she managed to bring her camera-gun into firing position, but the weapon must have been damaged by her fall. She cried out and threw it from her, in a smoking, spark-spitting arc that culminated in the main body of the pack. Even as it exploded in a soundless flare of raw energy she was tugging the borrowed stun gun from its holster.

Once she fired, and once only, and one of the wolves faltered in the very act of leaping, slumped to the ground. The other one completed its spring and was on her, teeth and taloned hind-paws slashing. Brasidus was out of the car, running, a pistol in each hand. But he could not use his guns — animal and alien formed together a wildly thrashing tangle, and to fire at one would, almost certainly, mean hitting the other. But the Arcadian was fighting desperately and well, as yet seemed to be undamaged. Her hands about the brute's neck were keeping those slavering jaws from her throat, and her knee in the wolf's belly was still keeping those slashing claws at a distance. But she was tiring. It would not be long before sharp fangs found her jugular or slashing talons opened her up from breastbone to groin.

Dropping his weapons, Brasidus jumped. From behind he got his own two hands about the furry throat, his own knee into the beast's back.

He exerted all of his strength, simultaneously pulled and thrust. The animal whined — then was abruptly silent as the air supply to the labouring lungs was cut off. But it was still strong, was still resisting desperately, was striving to turn so that it could face this fresh enemy. Margaret Lazenby had fallen clear of the fight, was slowly crawling to where she had dropped her own pistol.

She never had to use it. Brasidus brought his last reserves of strength into play, heard the sharp *snap* of broken vertebrae. The fight was over.

He got groggily to his feet, ready to face and to fight a fresh wave of carnivores. But, save for the Arcadian, the squealing child and himself, the hillside was bare of life. There were charred bodies — human and animal—where the laser weapon had exploded; the other wolves, such of them as had survived, must have fled. The stench of burning flesh was heavy in the air.

At a tottering run Margaret Lazenby was hurrying to the child, the only survivor of the Exposure. More slowly, Brasidus followed, looked down at the little, naked body. He said, "It would have been kinder to let it die. What sort of life can it expect with that deformity?"

"Deformity? What the hell do you mean?"

Wordlessly he pointed to the featureless scissure of the baby's thighs.

"Deformity? This, you fool, is a perfectly formed female child."

She got down to her knees and tenderly picked up the infant. And, as she did so, it became somehow obvious that the odd mounds of flesh on her chest, fully revealed now that her shirt had been torn away, were,

after all, functional. The baby stopped crying, groped greedily for an erect pink nipple.

Peggy laughed shakily. "No, darling, no. I'm sorry, but the milk bar's not open for business . . . I'll make up a bottle for you when we get back to the ship . . ."

"So . . ." muttered Brasidus at last. "So it is one of *your* race."

"Yes."

"And those . . . lumps are where you fission from . . ."

She said, "You've still a lot to learn. And now give me your tunic, will you."

"My tunic?"

"Yes. Don't just stand there, looking as though you've never seen a woman before."

Brasidus silently stripped off his upper garment, handed it to her. He expected that she would put the child back on the ground while she covered her own semi-nudity. But she did not. Instead, she wrapped the baby in the tunic, cooing to it softly. "There, there . . . You were cold, weren't you? But Mummy will keep you warm, and Mummy will see you're fed. . . ." She straightened, then snapped in a voice of command, "Take me back to the ship, as fast as all the Odd Gods of the Galaxy will let you!"

Chapter 18

So they drove back to the ship, swiftly, by-passing Kilgis — Brasidus had no desire to meet again the Village Corporal — taking roads that avoided all centres of population, however small. Peggy was in the back of the car, making soft, soothing noises to the querulous infant. Achron, thought Brasidus sullenly, would have appreciated this display of paternal

solicitude — but he did not. And what did he feel? Jealousy, he was obliged to admit, resentment at being deprived of the Arcadian's company. Perverts the Doctors in the Creche might be — but these aliens could and did exert a dangerous charm. But when it came to a showdown, as now, they had no time for mere humans, lavished their attentions only upon their own kind.

Suddenly the child was silent. The car was speeding down a straight stretch of road, as Brasidus was able to risk turning his head to see what was happening. Peggy had the stopper out of the wine flask, was dipping a corner of her handkerchief into it, then returning the soaked scrap of rag to the eager mouth of the baby. She grinned ruefully as she met Brasidus' stare. "I know it's all wrong," she said. "But I haven't a feeding bottle. Too, it will help if the brat is sound asleep when we get back to the spaceport . . ."

"And will it help?" demanded Brasidus, turning his attention back to the road ahead.

She said, "It's occurred to me that we have probably broken quite a few laws. Apart from anything else, armed assault upon the person of a police officer must be illegal . . ."

"It is. But *you* carried out the armed assault. *We* did not."

She laughed. "Too true. But what about *our* interference with the Exposure? It will be better for both of us if your boss doesn't know that the interference was a successful one."

"I must make my report," said Brasidus stiffly.

"Of course." Her voice was soft, caressing. "But need it be a *full* report? We got into a fight with the

wolf pack — there's too much evidence littered around on the hillside for us to lie our way out of that. I've a few nasty scratches on my back and my breasts . . ."

"So that's what they're called. I was wondering."

"Never mind that now. I've got these scratches, so it's essential that I get back on board as soon as possible for treatment by our own Doctor . . ."

"I thought that you were the ship's Doctor."

"I'm not. I have a Doctorate in my own field, which is not medicine. But let me finish. We had this fight with these four-legged sharks you people call wolves. I fell out of the car, and you jumped out and saved my life, although not before I was mauled a little. And that's near enough to the truth, isn't it?"

"Yes. . ."

"Now, the child. She'll fit nicely into the hamper you brought the provisions in. The poor little tot will be in a drugged stupor by the time we get to the spaceport, so she'll be quiet enough. And with your tunic spread over her — who will know?"

"I don't like it," said Brasidus.

"That makes two of us, my dear. I don't like to conceal the evidence of actions that, on any world but this, would bring a public condemnation."

"But Diomedes will know."

"How can he know? We were there, he was not. And we don't even have to make sure that we tell the same story, exact in every detail. He can question you — but he can't question *me*."

"Don't be so sure about that, Peggy."

"Oh, he'd like to, Brasidus. He'd like to. But he knows that at all times there are sufficient officers and ratings aboard *Seeker* to handle the Drive and main and secondary armaments. He knows that we could swat your gasbags out of the sky in a split second — and then raze the City in our own good time." There was a long silence. Then — "I'm sorry to have gotten you into quite a nasty mess, Brasidus — but you realise that I had no choice."

"Like calls to like," he replied with bitter flippancy.

"You could put it that way, I suppose — but you're wrong. Anyhow, I'm sure that I shall be able to persuade John — Commander Grimes — to offer you the sanctuary of our ship if you're really in the cactus."

"I'm a Spartan," he said.

"With all the Spartan virtues, I suppose. Do *you* have that absurd legend about the boy who let the fox gnaw his vitals rather than cry out? No matter. Just tell Captain Diomedes the truth, but not the whole truth. Say that it was all my fault, and that you did your best to restrain me. Which you did — although it wasn't good enough. Say that you saved me from the wolves . . ."

They drove on in silence while Brasidus pondered his course of action. What the Arcadian had said was true, what she had proposed might prevent an already unpleasant situation from becoming even more unpleasant. In saving Peggy's life he had done no more than his duty — in helping to save the life of the deformed — deformed? — child he, an officer of the law, had become a criminal. And why had he done this? With the destruction

of the laser-camera the alien had lost her only advantage.

And why had he *known*, why did he still *know*, that his part in the rescue operations had been essentially *right*?

It was this strange awareness of rightness that brought him to full agreement with his companion's propositions. Until now he had accepted without question the superior intellectual and moral stature of those holding higher rank than himself — but it was obvious that aboard *Seeker* there were officers, highly competent technicians with superbly trained men and fantastically powerful machinery at their command, whose moral code varied widely from the Spartan norm. (Come to that — what about the Doctors, the top-ranking aristocrats of the planet, whose own morals were open to doubt? What about the Doctors, and their own perverse relations with the Arcadians?)

Peggy's voice broke into his thoughts. "She's sleeping now. Out like a light. Drunk as a fiddler's bitch. I think that we shall be able to smuggle her on board without trouble..." She went on, "I appreciate this, Brasidus. I do. I wish . . ." He realised that she must be standing up in the back of the car, leaning towards him. He felt her breasts against the bare skin of his back. The contact was like nothing that he had ever imagined. He growled, "Sit down, damn you. Sit down — if you want this wagon to stay on the road!"

Chapter 19

They encountered no delays on their way back to the spaceport — but, once they were inside the main gates, it was obvious that their return had been anticipated. Diomedes, backed

by six armed hoplites, was standing, glowering, outside his office. A little away from him was John Grimes — and it was not a ceremonial sword that depended from his belt but two holstered pistols. And there was another officer from the ship with him, wearing a walky-talky headset. The Commander glared at Brasidus and his companion with almost as much hostility as did the Security Captain.

Diomedes raised an imperious arm. Brasidus brought the car to a halt. Grimes said something to his officer, who spoke into the mouthpiece of his headset. Brasidus, looking beyond the young man to the ship, saw that the turrets housing her armaments were operational, the long barrels of weapons, fully extruded, waving slowly like the questing antennae of some giant insect.

"Brasidus. . ." Diomedes' voice was a high-pitched squeal, a sure sign of bad temper. "I have received word from the Village Corporal at Kilgis. I demand your report — and *your* report, Dr. Lazenby — immediately. You will both come into my office."

"Captain Diomedes," said Grimes coldly, "you have every right to give orders to your own officers, but none whatsoever to issue commands to my personnel. Dr. Lazenby will make her report to me aboard my ship."

"I have means of enforcing my orders, Commander Grimes."

As one man, the six hoplites drew their stun uns.

Grimes laughed. "My Gunnery Officer has his instructions, Captain Diomedes. He's watching us from the control room through very high powered binoculars and, furthermore, he is hearing everything that is being said. . ."

id what are his instructions,

Commander?"

"There's just one way for you to find out, Captain. I shouldn't advise it, though."

"All right." With a visible effort Diomedes brought himself under control. "All right. I request, then, Commander, that you order your officer to accompany Brasidus into my office for questioning. You, and as many of your people as you wish, may be present."

Grimes, obviously, was giving consideration to what Diomedes had said. It was reasonable enough. Brasidus knew that if he were in the space captain's shoes he would have agreed. But suppose that somebody decided to investigate the contents of that food hamper on the back seat, some thirsty man hopeful that a drink of wine might remain in the flagon . . . Or suppose that the effects of the alcohol on the presently sleeping baby suddenly wore off . . .

Margaret Lazenby took charge. She stood up in the back of the car — and the extent of her dishevelment was suddenly obvious. The men stared at her, and Grimes, his fists clenched, took a threatening step towards Brasidus, growling, "You bastard . . ."

"Stop it, John!" The Arcadian's voice was sharp. "Brasidus didn't do this . . ."

"Then who did?"

"Damn it all! Can't you see that I want at least another shirt, as well as some medical attention for these scratches? But if you must know, I made Brasidus take me to watch the Exposure . . ."

"So the Village Corporal told me," put in Diomedes. "And between you, the pair of you slaughtered an entire wolf pack."

"We went too close, and they attacked us. They pulled me out of the car, but Brasidus saved me. And now, Captain Diomedes, I'd like to get back on board as soon as possible for an antibiotic shot and some fresh clothing." Before leaving the car she stooped to lift the hamper from the back seat, handed it to Grimes' officer.

"What's in that basket?" demanded Diomedes.

"Nothing that concerns you!" she flared.

"I'll decide that," Grimes stated. "Here, Mr. Taylor. Let me see."

The officer turned to face his captain, with his body hiding the hamper from Diomedes and his men. It was not intentional — *or was it?* Grimes, his face emotionless, lifted Brasidus' torn tunic from the open top of the wickerwork container. He said calmly, "One wine flagon. About six inches of gnarled sausage. The heel of a loaf of crusty bread. *You* decide, Captain, what may be brought off the ship on to your world, *I* decide what may be brought from your world onto my ship. Mr. Taylor, take this hamper to the Bio-Chemist so that its contents may be analysed. And you, Dr. Lazenby, report at once to the Surgeon. I'll receive your report later."

"Commander Grimes, I insist that I inspect that hamper." Three of the hoplites stepped forward, began to surround Mr. Taylor.

"Captain Diomedes, if any of your men dare to lay hands upon my officer the consequences will be serious."

Diomedes laughed incredulously. "You'd open fire over a mug of wine and a couple of scraps of bread and sausage?"

"Too right I would."

SPARTAN PLANET

Diomedes laughed again. "You aliens . . ." he said contemptuously. "All right, you can have your crumbs from the Sergeants' Mess. And I'd like a few words with your Dr. Lazenby as soon as she can spare me the time. And I'll have rather more than a few words with *you*, Brasidus, *now!*"

Reluctantly Brasidus got out of the car.

"And you let her threaten you with a laser weapon — and, furthermore, one that you had allowed her to carry."

Brasidus, facing Diomedes who was lolling behind his desk, said rebelliously, "You, sir, checked her equipment. And she told me herself that the thing did function as a camera."

"All right. We'll let this pass. You allowed her to use a stun gun on the Village Corporal and the innkeeper, and then you drove her out to the Exposure. Why, Brasidus, did you have to stop at Kilkis, of all villages, on this day, of all days?"

"Nobody told me not to, sir. And, as you know, the dates of the Exposures are never advertised. You might have been informed, but I was not."

"So you drove her out to see the Exposure. And you got too close. And the wolves attacked you, and pulled her out of the car."

"That is correct, sir."

"Surely she could have used this famous laser-camera to defend herself."

"It was damaged, sir. She had to throw it away in a hurry. It blew up."

"Yes. I've been told there's an area on the hillside that looks as though some sort of bomb had been exploded . . ." He leaned back in his chair,

looked up at the standing Brasidus. "You say that the wolves attacked her. Are you sure it wasn't you?"

"And why should it have been me, sir?"

"Because it should have been. You let an alien order you around at gun point — and then you ask me why you should have attacked her! And now . . ." The words came out with explosive violence, "*What was in the hamper?*"

"Wine, sir. Bread. Sausage."

"And what was your tunic doing there?"

"I lent it to her, sir, to replace her own shirt."

"So, instead of wearing it she put it in the hamper."

"The air was warm, sir, when we got down from the mountains. She asked me if she could have it so that the fibres from which it is woven could be analysed by the . . . Bio-Chemist."

"H'm. All in all, Brasidus, you did not behave with great brilliance. Were it not for the fact that these aliens — or one alien in particular — seem to like you, I should dispense with your services. As it is, you are still useful. Now, just what were Margaret Lazenby's reactions when she learned of the Exposure?"

Lying, Brasidus knew, would be useless. The Village Corporal at Kilgis would have made a full report. He said, "She was shocked. She wanted to get to the site in time to rescue the deformed and defective children."

"You were not in time, of course."

"No, sir. We were not in time." He added virtuously, "I made sure of that."

"How, Brasidus?"

"I knew the way, she did not.

I was able to make a detour."

The answer seemed to satisfy the Security Captain. He grunted, "All right. You may sit down." For a few seconds he drummed on the desk top with his fingertips. "Meanwhile, Brasidus, the situation in the city is developing. Commander Grimes allowed his Arcadians, as well as the human members of his crew, shore leave. There was an unfortunate occurrence in the Tavern of the Three Harpies. An Arcadian, accompanied by a human spaceman, went in there. They got drinking with the other customers . . ."

"Not the sort of place that I'd drink in by choice," Brasidus said, the other's silence seeming to call for some sort of comment.

"They were not so fortunate as to have a guide, such as yourself, to keep them out of trouble." *You sarcastic swine*, thought Brasidus. "Anyhow, there was the usual crowd there. Helots of the labouring class, hoplites not fussy about the company they keep. It wouldn't have been so bad if the two spacemen had just taken one drink and then walked out — but they stayed there, drinking with the locals, and allowed themselves to be drawn into an argument. And you know how arguments in the Three Harpies usually finish."

"There was a fight, sir?"

"Brilliant, Brasidus, brilliant. There was a fight. and the human spaceman was laid out, and the Arcadian was beaten up a little, and then stripped. There was, you will understand, some curiosity as to what her body was like under her uniform . . ."

"That was bad, sir."

"There's worse to follow. At least four hoplites had sexual intercourse

with her by force . . ."

"So it is possible, sir, in spite of the malformation. . ."

Diomedes chuckled obscenely. "It's possible, all right. Everybody in the tavern would have had her if the other spaceman hadn't come round and started screaming for help on a little portable transceiver he wore on his wrist. A dozen men from the ship rushed in, real toughs — and I wish that my own personnel could learn *their* techniques of unarmed combat. Then the police condescended to intervene and laid everybody out with their stun guns, and then Commander Grimes, who'd heard about it somehow, came charging in to my office threatening to devastate the city, and...

"Anyhow, you can see why I had to handle this Lazenby creature with kid gloves. Even though Grimes admits that his own crew were at fault — he had issued strict orders that no sight-seeing party was to consist of less than six people — he was furious about the rape, as he called it. You saw how he reacted when he thought that you had been doing something of the kind. He demanded that the rapists be punished most severely."

"But they were hoplites, sir, not helots. They had the right. . ."

"I know, I know. When I need instruction in the finer points of Spartan Law I'll not come to you. The conduct was discourteous rather than criminal. The culprits will, by this time, have been reprimanded by their commanding officer, and will, in all probability, be back in the Three Harpies, telling anybody who cares to listen what intercourse is like with an Arcadian. It is, I gather, quite an experience. Are you quite sure that you didn't . . ."

"Quite sure, sir."

"That's your story, and you stick to it." Again there was a pause, and the muffled drumming of Diomedes' fingers on the top of his desk. Then the Security Captain went on, "Even on Sparta we have experienced the occasional mutiny, the infrequent rebellion. Tell me, Brasidus, what are the prime causes of mutiny?"

"Discontent, sir. Overly strict discipline. Unjust punishments. . ."

"And . . .?"

"That's about all, sir."

"What about envy, Brasidus?"

"No, sir. We all know that if we show ability we shall become officers, with all the privileges that go with rank."

"But what if there's a privilege out of reach to everybody except a few members of one aristocratic caste?"

"I don't see what you mean, sir."

"Brasidus, Brasidus, what do you use for brains? What about that nest of Arcadians in the Creche? What do you suppose the Doctors use them for?"

"I . . . I can guess."

"And so they have something that the rest of us haven't. And so. . ." Diomedes' voice dropped almost to a whisper. . . "the power that they've enjoyed for so long, for too long, may be broken."

"And *you*," said Brasidus, "envy them that power."

For long seconds the captain glared at him across the desk. Then — "All right, I do. But it is for the good of the State that I am working against them."

Perhaps, thought Brasidus. *Perhaps*. But he said nothing.

Clad in labouring helot's drab, patched tunic, his feet unshod and filthy, his face and arms liberally besmeared with the dirt of the day's toil, Brasidus sat hunched at one of the long tables in the Tavern of the Three Harpies. There were hoplites there as well as manual workers, but there was little chance that any of them would recognise him. Facial similarities were far from uncommon on Sparta.

He sat there, taking an occasional noisy gulp from his mug, and listening.

One of the hoplites was holding forth to his companions. "Yes, it was on this very table that I had him. Or *it*. Good, it was. You've no idea unless you've tried it yourself. . ."

"Must've been odd. Wrong, somehow."

"It was odd, all right. But wrong nohow. This face to face business. And those two dirty great cushions for your chest to rest on. . ."

"Is *that* what they're for?"

"Must be. Pity the Doctors can't turn out some of those creatures from their Birth Machine."

"But they do. Yes. They do."

Everybody turned to stare at the man who had just spoken. He was a stranger to Brasidus, but his voice and his appearance marked him for what he was. This was not the sort of inn that the nurses from the Creche usually frequented — in an establishment such as this they would run a grave risk of suffering the same fate as the unfortunate Arcadian from the ship. "They do," he repeated in his high-pitched sing-song, and looked straight at Brasidus. There was something in his manner that implied, *And you know, too.*

So this was the fellow agent whom

Diomedes had told him that he would find in the tavern, the operative to whom he would render assistance if necessary.

"And what do *you* know about it, dearie?" demanded the boastful hoplite.

"I'm a nurse. . ."

"That's obvious, sweetie pie."

"I'm a nurse, and I work at the Creche. We nurses aren't supposed to stray from our wards, but. . ."

"But with a snout like yours, you're bound to be nosey," laughed the hoplite. ◊

The nurse stroked his overlong proboscis with his right index finger, grinned slyly. "How right you are, dearie. I admit it. I *like* to know what's going on. Oh, those Doctors! They live in a luxury, all right. You might think that practically all of the Creche is taken up by wards and machinery and the like — but it's not. More than half the building is *their* quarters. And the things they have! A heated swimming pool, even. . ."

"Decadent," grunted a grizzled old sergeant.

"But nice. Especially in midwinter. Not that I've ever tried it myself. There's a disused storeroom, and this pool is on the other side of its back wall. There're some holes in the wall, where there used to be wiring or pipes or something. Big enough for a camera lens. . ." The nurse fished a large envelope from inside the breast of his white tunic, pulled from it a sheaf of glossy photographs.

"Lemme see. Yes, those are Arcadians, all right. Topheavy, ain't they, when you see them standing up. . . Wonder how they can walk without falling flat on their faces. . ."

"If they did, they'd bounce. . ."

"Look sort of unfinished lower down, don't they?"

"Let me see!"

"Here, pass 'em round, can't you?"

Briefly, Brasidus had one of the prints in his possession. He was interested more in the likeness of the man standing by the pool than in that of his companion. Yes, it was Heraklion, all right, Heraklion without his robe but still, indubitably, the supercilious Doctor.

"Must have come in that ship," remarked somebody.

"No," the nurse told him. "Oh, no: They've been in the Creche for *years*."

"You mean your precious Doctors have *always* had them?"

"Yes. Nothing but the best for the guardians of the purity of our Spartan stock, dearie. But who are we to begrudge them their little comforts?"

"Soldiers, what's who. It's we who should be the top caste of this world, who should have the first pickings. After all, the King's a soldier."

"But the Doctors *made* him, dearie. They made all of us."

"Like hell they did. They just look after the Birth Machine. And if there wasn't a Machine we'd manage all right, just as the animals do."

"We might have to," the nurse said. "I heard two of the Doctors talking. They were saying that the people were having it too soft, that for the good of the race we should have to return to the old ways. They're thinking of shutting the-Machine down."

"What! How can you be a fighting man if you have to lug a child around with you?"

"But you said that we could manage all right without the Doctors."

"Yes. But that's different. No, the

way I see it is this. These Doctors are getting scared of the Military — but they know that if most of us are budding we shan't be good for fighting. Oh, the cunning swine! They just want things all their way all the time instead of for only most of the time."

"But you can't do anything about it," the nurse said.

"Can't we? Who have the weapons and the training to use 'em? Not your Doctors, that's for certain. With no more than the men in this tavern we could take the Creche — and get our paws on those Arcadians they've got stashed away there . . ."

"More than our paws!" shouted somebody.

"You're talking mutiny and treason, hoplite," protested the elderly sergeant.

"Am I?" The man was on his feet now, swaying drunkenly. "But the King himself had one of the Doctors excuted. That shows how much *he* thinks of 'em!" He paused, striving for words. They came at last. "Here, on Sparta, it's fair shares for all — excepting you poor bloody helots, of course. But for the rest of us, the rulers, it should be share an' share alike. Oh, I know that the Colonel gets better pay, better grub an' better booze than I do — but in the field he lives the same as his men, an' all of us can become Colonels ourselves if we put ourselves to it, an', come to that, Generals. But the Colonels an' the Generals an' the Admirals don't have Arcadians to keep their beds warm. Not even the King does. An' now there's some of us who know what it's like. An' there's some of us who want more of it."

"There're plenty of Arcadians a-

board the spaceship," somebody suggested.

"I may be drunk, fellow, but I'm not *that* drunk. The spaceship's a battlegewagon, and I've heard that the captain of her has already threatened to use his guns and missiles. No, the Creche'll be *easy* to take."

"Sit down, you fool!" ordered the elderly sergeant. "You got off lightly after you assaulted the Arcadian spaceman — but he was only a foreigner. Now you're inciting to riot, mutiny, and the gods alone know what else. The police will use more than stuns on you this time."

"Will they, old timer? Will they? And what if they do? A man can die only once. What I did to that Arcadian has done something to me, to *me*, do you hear? I have to do it again, even though I get shot for it. . . ." The man's eyes were crazy and his lips foam-flecked. "You don't know what it was like. You'll never know, until you do it. Don't talk to me about boys, or about soft, puling nurses like our longnosed friend here. The Doctors have the best there is, the best that there can ever be, and they should be made to share it!"

"The police. . ." began the sergeant.

"Yes. The police. Now let me tell you, oldtimer, that I kept my ears flapping while they had me in their barracks. Practically every man has been called out to guard the spaceport — the *spaceport*, do you hear? That alien captain's afraid that there'll be a mob coming out to take *his* pretty Arcadians by force, and fat old Captain Diomedes is afraid that the space captain'll start firing off in all directions if his ship and his little pets are menaced. By the time that the police get back to the city every Arca-

dian in the Creche'll know what a *real* man is like, an' we shall all be tucked up in our cots in our quarters sleeping innocently."

"I didn't see a single policeman on my way here," contributed the nurse. "I wondered why. . ." And then, in spurious alarm, "But you can't. You mustn't. You mustn't attack the Creche!"

"And who says I mustn't, you, you feeble imitation of a . . . a . . ." He concluded triumphantly, "of an alien monster! Yes, that's a point. All this talk of them as alien monsters. It was only to put us off. But now we *know*. Or some of us *know*. Who's with me?"

The fools, thought Brasidus, *the fools!* as he listened to the crash of overturned benches, as he watched almost all the customers of the tavern, helots as well as hoplites, jump to their feet.

"The fools," he muttered aloud.

"And you would have been with them," whispered the nurse, "if I hadn't slipped a capsule into your drink." And then Brasidus saw the thin wisp of almost invisible vapour that was still trickling from the envelope in which the photographs had been packed. "I have access to certain drugs," said the man smugly, "and this one is used in our schoolrooms. It enhances the susceptibility of the students. . . ."

"Students. . ." repeated Brasidus disgustedly.

"They have a lot to learn, Lieutenant," the nurse told him.

"And so have I. I want to see what happens."

"Your orders were to protect me."

"There's nobody here to protect you from — except the old sergeant.

But why wasn't *he* affected?"

"Too old," said nurse.

"Then you're quite safe."

Chapter 21

Brasidus made his way from the tavern out into the street.

He would have retreated to the safety of the inn, but he was given no opportunity to do so. A roaring torrent of men swept along the street, hoplites and helots, shouting, cursing and screaming. He was caught up by the human tide, buffeted and jostled, crying out with pain himself when a heavy, military sandal smashed down on one of his bare feet. He was sucked into the mob, made part of it, became just one tiny drop of water in the angry wave that was rearing up to smash down upon the Creche.

At first he was fighting only to keep upright, to save himself from falling, from being trampled underfoot. And then — slowly, carefully and, at times, viciously — he began to edge out towards the fringe of the living current. At last he was able to stumble into a cross alley where he stood panting, recovering his breath, watching the rioters stream past.

At last he was able to think.

It seemed obvious to him that Diomedes must have planted his agents in more than one tavern. It was obvious, too, that Diomedes, ever the opportunist, had regarded the unfortunate incident at the Three Harpies as a heaven-sent opportunity for rabble-rousing — and as an excuse for the withdrawal of all police from the City. And that is all that it was — an excuse. It was doubtful, thought Brasidus, that Grimes had demanded protection. The spaceman was quite capable of looking after himself and his

own people — and if the situation got really out of hand could always lift ship at a second's notice.

But there were still puzzling features in the situation. The Military Police were under the command of a general, Rexenor, with the usual tally of Colonels and Majors subordinate to him. Diomedes was only a captain. How much power did the man wield? How much backing had he? Was he — and this seemed more than likely — answerable only to the Palace?

The mob was thinning out now; there were only the stragglers half-rushing, stumbling over the cobblestones. There were only the stragglers — and already the first of the scavengers were emerging from their hiding places, sniffing cautiously at the crumpled bodies of those who had been crushed and trampled. Brasidus fell in with the tattered rearguard, kept pace with a withered, elderly man in rough and dirty working clothes.

"Don't. . . know. . . why. . . we . . . bother. . ." grunted this individual between gasping breaths. "Bloody. . . hoplites. . . 'll. . . be . . . there. . . first. All. . . the. . . bloody. . . pickings. . . as. . . bloody. . . usual. . ."

"What pickings?"

"Food. . . wine. . . Those. . . bloody. . . Doctors. . . worse. . . 'n . . . bloody. . . soldiers. . . Small. . . wonder. . . the. . . King. . . has. . . turned. . . against. . . 'em. . ."

"And. . . the Arcadians?"

"Wouldn't. . . touch. . . one. . . o'. . . them. . . wi'. . . barge. . . pole. Unsightly. . . monsters. . ."

Ahead, the roar of the mob had risen to an ugly and frightening intensity. There were flames, too, leaping high, a billowing glare in the night

sky. The crowd had broken into a villa close by the Creche, the club house of the senior nursing staff. They had dragged furniture out into the roadway and set fire to it. Some of its unfortunate owners fluttered ineffectually about the blaze and, until one of them had the sense to organize his mates into a bucket party, were treated with rough derision only. And then the crowd turned upon the firemen, beating them, even throwing three of them on to the bonfire. Two of them managed to scramble clear and ran, screaming, their robes ablaze. The other just lay there, writhing and shrieking.

Brasidus was sickened. There was nothing that he could do. He was alone and unarmed — and most of the soldiers among the rioters carried their short swords and some of them were already using them, hacking down the surviving nurses who were still foolish enough to try to save their property. There was nothing at all that he could do — and he should have been in uniform, not in these rags, and armed, with a squad of men at his command, doing his utmost to quell the disorder.

Damn Diomedes! he thought. He knew, with sudden clarity, where his real loyalties lay — to the maintenance of law and order and, on a more personal level, to his friend Achron, on duty inside the Creche and soon almost inevitably, to be treated as had been these hacked and incinerated colleagues of his.

The Andronicus warehouse. . .

Nobody noticed him as he crossed the road to that building; the main body of the rioters was attempting to force the huge door of the Creche with a battering ram improvised from a torn-down street lamp standard.

And then, looking at the massive door set in the black, featureless wall of the warehouse, he realised that he was in dire need of such an implement himself. He could, he knew, enlist the aid of men on the fringes of the crowd eager for some violence in which they, themselves, could take part — but that was the last thing that he wanted. He would enter the Creche alone, if at all.

But how?

How?

Overhead, barely audible, there was a peculiar throbbing noise, an irregular beat. He thought, *So the Navy is intervening . . .*, then realised that the sound was not that of an airship's engines. He looked up, saw flickering, ruddy light reflected from an oval surface. And then, in a whisper that seemed to originate only an inch from his ear, a familiar voice asked, "Is that you, Brasidus?"

"Yes."

"I owe you plenty. We'll pick you up and take you clear of this mess. I had to promise not to intervene — I'm just observing and recording — but I'll always break a promise to help a friend."

"I don't want to be picked up, Peggy."

"Then what the hell do you want?"

"I want to get into this warehouse. But the door is locked, and there aren't any windows, and I haven't any explosives. . ."

"You could get your cobbles to help. Or don't you want to share the loot?"

"I'm not looting. And I want to get into the Creche by myself, not with a mob."

"I shouldn't mind a look inside myself, before it's too late. Hold on,

"I'll be right with you." Then, in a fainter voice, she was giving orders to somebody in the flying machine. "I'm going down, George. Get the ladder over, will you. Yes, yes, I know what Commander Grimes said, but Brasidus saved my life. And you just keep stoogeing around in the pinnacle, and be ready to come a-runnin' to pick us up when I yell for you. . . Yes, yes. Keep the cameras and the recorder running. . ."

"Have you a screwdriver?" asked Brasidus.

"A screwdriver?"

"If you have, bring it."

"All right."

A light, flexible ladder snaked down from the almost invisible hull. Clad in black coveralls, Peggy Lazenby was herself almost invisible as she rapidly dropped down it. As soon as she was standing on the ground the pinnacle lifted, vanished into the night sky.

"What now, duckie?" she asked.

"What now?"

"That door," Brasidus told her, pointing.

"With a screwdriver? Are you quite mad?"

"We shall need that later. But I was sure that you'd have one of your laser-cameras along."

"As it happens, I haven't. But I do have a laser pistol — which, on low intensity, is a quite useful electric torch. . . ." She pulled the weapon from its holster, made an adjustment, played a dim beam on the double door. "H'm. Looks like a conventional enough lock. . . And I don't think that your little friends will notice a very brief and discreet fireworks display. . ."

She made another adjustment, and the beam became thread-thin and

blinding. There was a brief coruscation of sparks, a spatter of incandescent globules of molten metal.

"That should be it. Push, Brasidus."

Brasidus pushed. There was resistance that suddenly yielded, and the massive valves swung inwards.

Nobody noticed them entering the warehouse — the entire attention of the mob was centered on the door of the Creche, which was still holding. When they were inside Brasidus pushed the big doors shut. Then he asked, "How did you find me?"

"I wasn't looking for you. We knew about the riot, of course, and I persuaded John to let me take one of the pinnacles so that I could observe the goings on. Our lift-off coincided with a test firing of the auxiliary rocket drive — even your Captain Diomedes couldn't blame Commander Grimes for wanting to be all ready for a hasty get-away. And the radar look-out kept by your Navy must be very lax — although, of course, our screen was operating. Anyhow, I was using my infra-red viewer, and when I saw a solitary figure slink away from the main party I wondered what mischief *he* was up to. I focused on him, and, lo and behold, it was you. Not that I recognised you at first. I much prefer you in uniform. Now, what is all this about?"

"I wish that I knew. But the mob's trying to break into the Creche, and I've at least one friend in there whom I'd like to save. Too. . . Oh, damn it all, I am a policeman, and I just can't stand by doing nothing."

"What about your precious Diomedes? What part is he playing in all this?"

"Come on," he snarled. "Come on.

"We've wasted enough time already." He found the light switch just inside the door, pressed it, then led the way to the hatch in the floor. They went through it, down into the basement, and then to the big chamber. Peggy helped him to open the door, followed him to the far insulated wall. Yes, that was the panel beyond which lay the tunnel—the slots of the screwheads glittered with betraying bright metal.

At the far end of the tunnel the door into the Creche was not secured and opened easily.

Chapter 22

It was quiet in the passageway — but, dull and distant, the ominous thudding of the battering ram could be heard. And there was the sound of crying, faint and far away, the infants in the wards screaming uncontrollably.

"Which way?" Peggy was asking. "Which way?"

"This way, I think." He set off at a run along the corridor, his bare feet noiseless on the polished floor. She followed at the same pace, her soft-soled shoes making an almost inaudible shuffle. They ran on, past the closed, numbered doors. At the first cross alleyway Brasidus turned right without hesitation — as long as he kept the clangour of forcible entry as nearly ahead as possible he could not go far wrong.

And then one of the doors opened. From it stepped the tall, yellow-haired Arcadian whom Brasidus had encountered during his first trespass. She was dressed, this time, in a belted tunic, and her feet were shod in heavy sandals. And she carried a knife that was almost a short sword.

"Stop!" she ordered. "Stop!"

Brasidus stopped, heard Margaret Lazenby slither to a halt behind him.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"Brasidus. Lieutenant, Police Branch of the Army. Take us to whoever's in charge here."

"Oh, I recognise you. That painfully shy workman who strayed in from the warehouse. . . *But who are you?*"

"I'm from the ship."

"What I thought." The blonde stood there, juggling absently with her knife. *And she'll be able to use it.* . . thought Brasidus. "What I thought," repeated the woman. "So, at long last, the Police and the outworld space captain have dedigitated, and are arriving in the nick of time to save us all from a fate worse than death. . ."

"I'm afraid not," Peggy Lazenby told her. "Our respective lords and masters have yet to dedigitate. We're here in our private capacities. . ."

"But you're hung around with all sorts of interesting looking hardware, dearie. And I can lend Brasidus a meat chopper if he wants it."

Brasidus said that he did. It was not his choice of weapons, but it was better than nothing. The Arcadian went back through the door, through which drifted the sound of excited, high-pitched voices, returned with the dull-gleaming implement. Brasidus took it. The haft fitted his right hand nicely, and the thing had a satisfying heft to it. Suddenly he felt less helpless, less naked.

"And what's your name, by the way?" the blonde Arcadian was asking.

"Lazenby. Peggy Lazenby."

"You can call me Terry. Short for

Theresa — not that it matters. Come on."

With her as a guide they found their way to the vestibule without any delays, by-passing the wards which the infants were making hideous with their screams. But the noise in this entrance hall was deafening enough; it was like being inside a lustily beaten bass drum. Furniture had been piled inside the door, but with each blow of the battering ram some article would crash to the floor.

There were Doctors there, white-faced but, so far, not at the point of panic. There were nurses there — no braver than their superiors, but no more cowardly. They were armed, all of them, after a fashion. Sharp, dangerous looking surgical instruments gleamed in tight-clenched fists, rude clubs, legs torn from pieces of furniture, dangled from hands that had but rarely performed rougher work than changing a baby's napkins.

"Heraklion!" Terry was calling, shouting to make herself heard above the tumult. "Heraklion!"

The tall Doctor turned to face her. "What are you doing here, Terry? I thought I told you women to keep out of harm's way. . . ." Then he saw Brasidus and Peggy. "Who the hell are these?" He began to advance, the scalpel in his right hand extended menacingly.

"Lieutenant Brasidus. Security. . ."

"Looks like a helot to me," muttered somebody. "Kill the bastard!"

"Wait. Brasidus? Yes, it could be. . ."

"It is, it is!" One of the nurses broke away from his own group, ran to where Heraklion was standing. "It is. Of course it's Brasidus!"

"Thank you, Achron. You should know. But who are you, Madam?"

"Dr. Margaret Lazenby, of the starship *Seeker*."

Heraklion's eyes dwelt long and lovingly on the weapon at her belt. "And have you come to help us?"

"I let myself get talked into it."

"I knew you'd come," Achron was saying to Brasidus. "I *knew* you'd come. . . ." And Brasidus was uncomfortably aware of Peggy Lazenby's ironic regard. He said to Heraklion, more to assert himself than for any other reason, "And what is happening, Doctor?"

"You ask me that, young man? You're Security, aren't you? You're Captain Diomedes' right hand man, I've heard. What *is* happening?"

Brasidus looked slowly around at the little band of defenders with their makeshift armaments. He said, "I know what *will* happen. Massacre, with ourselves at the receiving end. That door'll not hold for much longer. Is there anywhere to retreat to?"

"Retreat?" demanded Heraklion scornfully. "Retreat, from a mob of hoplites and helots?"

"They — the hoplites — have weapons, sir. And they know how to use them."

"Your Dr. Lazenby has weapons— *real* weapons."

"Perhaps I have," she said quietly. "But Ethology happens to be my specialty. I've studied the behaviour of mobs. A machine gun is a fine weapon to use against them — but a hand gun, no matter how deadly, only infuriates them."

"There's the Birth Machine Room. . . ." suggested somebody. "I've heard said that it could withstand a hydrogen bomb blast."

"Impossible!" snapped Heraklion. "Nobody here is sterile, and to take

the time to scrub up and break out robes at this time. . ."

"The Birth Machine won't be much use with nobody around to operate it," said Brasidus.

Heraklion pondered this statement—and while he was doing so a heavy desk crashed from the top of the pile of furniture barricading the door. Half-heartedly, three of the nurses struggled to replace it—and dislodged a table and a couple of chairs. "All right," he said suddenly. "The Room it is. Terry, run along and round up the other women and get them there at once. Dr. Hermes, get along there yourself with all these people. . ."

"And what about the children?" Achron, in his agitation, was clutching Heraklion's sleeve. "What about the children?"

"H'm. Yes. I suppose that somebody had better remain on duty in each ward. . ."

"No, Doctor," said Brasidus. "It won't do at all. Those wild animals out there hate the nurses as much as they hate you. To the hoplites they're helots who live better than soldiers do. To the helots they're over-privileged members of their own caste. Those nurses with the villa outside the Creche have all been killed. I saw it happen."

"But the *children*. . ." Achron's voice was a wail.

"They'll be safe enough. They might miss a meal or a nappy change—but it won't kill 'em."

"And if there's no other way out of it," put in Peggy Lazenby, we'll make them our personal charge." She winced as an uproar from the nearer ward almost drowned out the heavy thudding of the battering ram. "I

sincerely hope that it never comes to that."

One of the nurses screamed. The pile of furniture was tottering. The men below it tried to shore it with their bodies, but not for long. A spear probed through the widening gap between the two valves, somehow found its mark in soft, human flesh. There was another scream—of pain, this time, not terror. There were other spearheads thrusting hopefully and not altogether blindly. There was a scurrying retreat from the crumbling barricade. Suddenly it collapsed, burying the wounded man, and the great valves edged slowly and jerkily inwards, all the pressure of the mob behind them, pushing aside and clearing a way through the wreckage. And through the widening aperture gusted the triumphant howling and shouting, and a great billow of acrid smoke.

The mob leaders were through, scrambling over the broken furniture, their dull weapons at the ready. There were a half dozen common soldiers, armed with swords. There was a fat seargeant, some kind of pistol in his right hand. He fired, the report sharp in spite of the general uproar. He fired again.

Beside Brasidus Peggy Lazenby gasped, caught hold of him with her left hand as she staggered. Then her own pistol was out, and the filament of incandescence took the sergeant full in the chest. But he came on, still he came on, still firing, the hoplites falling back to allow him passage, while the Arcadian fumbled with her gun, trying to transfer it from her right hand to her left. He came on, and Brasidus ducked uselessly as two bullets whined past his head in quick succession.

Then he fell to his knees as Achron shoved him violently to one side. The nurse's frail body jerked and shuddered as the projectiles thudded into him — but he, like the sergeant, refused to die. He lifted the table lid with which he had armed himself — brought it smashing down with all his strength on to the other's head. The wood splintered — but enough remained for a second blow, and a third. No more were necessary. The sergeant sagged to the floor — and Achron, with a tired sigh, collapsed on top of the gross body.

"He's dead. . ." muttered Brasi-dus, kneeling beside his friend. "He's dead. . ."

But mourning would have to wait. Hastily he shifted Achron's body to one side so that he could get at the sergeant's pistol. And then he saw the face of the dead man, recognisable in spite of the blood that had trickled down it.

It was Diomedes.

He got to his feet, ready to use the pistol. But he did not have to. Firing left-handed, Peggy Lazenby had shot down the other mob leaders, then used the weapon to ignite the tangle of wrecked furniture and the floor itself.

"That should hold 'em," she muttered. "Now lead us out of here, Doctor."

"But you're wounded. . ." Brasi-dus cried, looking for tell-tale patches of wetness on the dark material of her clothing.

"Just bruised. I'm wearing my bulletproof undies. But come on, you two. Hurry!"

Chapter 23

Suddenly the sprinklers came on, saturating the air of the vestibule

with aqueous mist and choking, acrid steam. But this was a help to the re-treating defenders, a hindrance to the mob. Frightened, the rioters drew back. They had been ready enough to charge bare-footed through and over blazing wreckage — now (but too briefly) the automatic firefighting system instilled in them the fear of the unknown. *An acid spray*, they must have thought, *or some lethal gas*. When their shouts made it obvious that they were inside the Creche, Heraklion and his party were already half way along the first of the lengthy corridors.

The Doctor, it was obvious, knew his way. Without him, Brasi-dus and Peggy Lazenby would have been hopelessly lost. He turned into cross alleyways without hesitation, finally led them up a ramp, at the head of which was a massive door. It was shut, of course. Heraklion cursed, wrestled with the hand wheel that, obviously, activated the securing device. It refused to budge.

Peggy Lazenby pulled out her laser pistol. Heraklion stared at her ironically. "Sure," he said. "Go ahead — if you've all day to play around in. But long before you've made even a faint impression you'll wish that you'd kept the charge in that weapon for something more useful."

The mob was closer now. They did not know the direction their quarry had taken, but they were spreading through the vast building, looting and smashing. Sooner or later some of them would stumble upon the ramp leading up to the room housing the Birth Machine. *Sooner*, thought Brasi-dus, *rather than later*. . . He examined the pistol that he had taken from Diomedes. It was a standard

officers' model Vulcan. One round up the spout, four remaining in the magazine. He regretted having dropped the cleaver that Terry had found for him.

"Here they are," announced Peggy unemotionally. She fired down the ramp, a slashing beam that scarred the paintwork of the walls at the foot of the incline. There was a scream—and, shockingly, there was the rapid, vicious chatter of a machine carbine. But whoever was using it was not anxious to expose himself, and the burst buried itself harmlessly in the ceiling.

"I thought that only *your* people were allowed firearms," said Heraklion bitterly to Brasidus. Brasidus said nothing. If Diomedes, armed, had been among the mob leaders, how many of the late Security Captain's trusted lieutenants were also involved?

Still Heraklion wrestled with the hand wheel, and still Peggy and Brasidus, pistols ready, kept their watch for hostile activity. But everything was quiet, too quiet — until at last, from the alleyway that ran athwart the foot of the ramp, there came an odd shuffling, scraping sound. Slowly, slowly the source of it edges into view. It was a heavy shield, mounted on a light trolley. Whoever had constructed it had known something about modern weaponry; a slab of concrete, torn up from a floor somewhere, was its main component. Of course, it could not withstand laser fire indefinitely — but long before it crumbled and disintegrated the riflemen behind it would have disposed of the laser weapon and its user.

There was a small, ragged hole roughly in the center of the slab. Brasidus nudged Peggy, drew her at-

tention to it. She nodded. Suddenly something metallic protruded from the aperture — something that flared and sputtered as the laser beam found it. But Brasidus, at the last moment, switched his own attention from the decoy to the rim of the shield, loosed off two hasty but accurate shots at the carbine that was briefly exposed, at the hands holding it.

Then Heraklion cried out. Under his hands the wheel had moved, was moving of its own accord. The enormously thick door was opening. The Doctor grabbed his companions, pulled them through the slowly widening gap, pushed them clear of the narrow entrance as a deadly hail of bullets splattered around it. Then he turned on the colleague who had, at last, admitted them. "Shut it. At once!" And, as the man obeyed, he demanded coldly, "You were along time opening up. Why?"

"We had to be sure it was you. We couldn't get the closed circuit TV working. . ."

"Even on this primitive planet," commented Peggy Lazenby, "one can find oneself at the mercy of a single fuse."

The little crowd of refugees, with their nervous chatter, seemed out of place in these surroundings. There was an air of mystery — of holy mystery, even — that could not be dispelled by the intrusion. Tier upon tier towered the vats, empty now, but spotlessly clean and gleaming. Mile after convoluted mile ran the piping — glittering glass, glowing plastic, bright-shining metal. Bank upon bank stood the pumps, silent now, but ready, in perfect order, awaiting the touch of a switch to carry out

their functions as mechanical hearts and lungs and excretory organs.

"There's no place like womb," remarked Margaret Lazenby.

"What was that, Peggy?"

"Never mind. You're too young to understand." Then, crisply official, "Dr. Heraklion, what now?"

"I . . . I don't know, Dr. Lazenby."

"You're in charge. Or are you?"

"I . . . I suppose that I am. I'm the Senior Doctor present."

"And Brasidus is the Senior Security Officer present, and I'm the Senior Interstellar Federation's Survey Service Officer present. And what about you, Terry? Are you the Senior Popsy?"

"I don't know. But the other girls usually do what I tell them to."

"So we're getting some place. But where? Where? That's the vital question. . ." She took two nervous strides forward, two nervous strides back. "I suppose that this glorified incubator is on the 'phone, Dr. Heraklion?"

"It is, Dr. Lazenby. Unluckily the main switchboard for the Creche is just off the vestibule."

"A pity. I was thinking that you might try to get through to the military. Or even to the Palace itself..."

"We tried that as soon as we were warned that the mob was heading our way. But we got no satisfaction. In fact, we gained the impression that the top military brass was having its own troubles."

"They could be, at that," contributed Brásidus. "That sergeant who was leading the rioters. The one with the pistol. It was Diomedes."

"What!"

Heraklion was incredulous, Marga-

ret Lazenby was not. She said. "It makes sense, of a kind. This wouldn't be the first time that an ambitious, comparatively junior officer has organised a coup. . . And I think that I know what makes him tick — or made him tick. There was the lust for power, of course. But, with it, there was a very deep and very real patriotism. I'm a woman, and I had to meet him officially. I could tell, each time, how much he hated me and feared me. No, not personally — but as a member of the opposite sex."

"There are some men — and he was one of them — to whom a world like yours would be the ultimate paradise. *Men Only*. There are some men to whom this stratified social system of yours — cribbed, with improvements, of course, from the *real* Spartans — would seem the only possible way of running a planet."

"But. . ."

"But, Dr. Heraklion, there are other men, such as you, who would find the monosexual, homosexual set-up rather unsatisfying. And you, my good Doctor, were in a position to do something about it. . ."

Heraklion smiled faintly. "It's been going on for a very long time, Dr. Lazenby. It all started a long time before I was born."

"All right. The Doctors were able to do something about it. I still don't know how this Birth Machine of yours works — but I can guess. I suppose that all approved Spartans make contributions of sperm cells. . ."

"That is so."

"And the most important contribution — correct me if I am wrong — will be the annual shipments made by the aptly named *Latterhaven Venus* and *Latterhaven Hera*. . . Venus and

Hera were Greek goddesses, by the way, Brasidus. Women — like me, and like Terry and the other playmates. How did the ships get their names, Heraklion?"

"We have always suspected the Latterhaveneers of a warped sense of humour."

"I wonder what the mob is doing?" asked somebody anxiously.

"We're safe enough here," said Heraklion curtly.

Are we? thought Brasidus, suddenly apprehensive. *Are we?* It seemed to him that the floor under his bare soles had become uncomfortably warm. He shifted his stance. Yes, the floor *was* heating up. He looked down, saw a crack in the polished surface. Surely it had not been there before. And if it had been, there had not been a thin wisp of smoke trickling from it.

He was about to tell Heraklion when a device on Peggy Lazenby's wrist — it looked like a watch but obviously was not — buzzed sharply. She raised her forearm to her face. "Dr. Lazenby here."

"Captain here. What the hell are you doing? Where are you?"

"Quite safe, John. I'm holed up in the Creche, in the Birth Machine Room. . ."

"The Creche is an inferno. Admiral Ajax requested my aid to evacuate the children and to restore order in the city. We're on the way now."

The floor tilted — slightly but sharply. One of the vats shattered loudly and the piping dependent from it swung, clattering and tinkling, against the vessels in the tier below, breaking them. The smell of smoke was suddenly very strong.

"Is there only one way out of this

place?" demanded Peggy sharply.

"No. There's a hatch in the roof. Through the Records Room," Heraklion told her.

"Then that's the way that we have to go to escape from this alleged H-bombproof shelter of yours. . . ." Into her wrist transceiver she said, "You'll have to pick us off the roof, John. And while you're about it you can send a squad of Marines down to save the firm's books. No, I'm not joking."

Luckily the hatch was clear, and luckily the ladder was readily available. Through the little room they passed — the women, the surviving nurses and doctors, then, last of all, Heraklion, Peggy and Brasidus. Brasidus had almost to pull her away from the shelves of microfilm records, and from the glass case in which was displayed the big, flat book on the cover of which, in tarnished gold, were the words, *Log of Interstellar Colonisation Ship DORIC. First Captain Deems Harris.*

They were on the roof then — the tilting, shuddering roof, swept by scorching eddies and black, billowing smoke. The night sky above them was alive with the noise of engines — and from below sounded, ever louder and more frightening, the roar of the fire. Cautiously Heraklion made his way down the listing surface of the low parapet. Brasidus followed him. The two men cautiously peered over, flinching back when a sudden gust of flame seared their faces, crisping their hair and eyebrows.

Grimes had sent down a landing party. Disciplined, uniformed men and women were handling chemical fire extinguishers, others, in a chain, were passing the children out of the blazing

building. And still others had set up weapons to protect the rescuers; the rattle of heavy automatic fire was loud and insistent above the other noises.

Peggy Lazenby had joined the two men. "Intervention. . ." she murmured. "Armed intervention. Poor John. He'll be in the cactus over this. But what else could he do? He couldn't let those babies burn to death. . ."

"As we shall do," stated Heraklion grimly, "unless your captain does something about it, and fast." As he spoke the roof tilted another few degrees.

But the peculiar, irregular throbbing of the Inertial Drive was louder now, was deafening. Directly overhead, the glare of the fire reflected from the burnished metal of her hull, *Seeker* dropped through the vortex of smoke and sparks. Lower she sagged, and lower, until men and women cried out in fear and ran in panic to escape from the inexorably descending pads of her vaned landing gear. Lower she sagged, and lower — and from her open main airlock the boarding ramp was suddenly extruded, the lower end of it scant millimetres only from the heaving, cracking surface of the roof. Even Brasidus knew that he was privileged to watch an exhibition of superb spacemanship.

Down the extended ramp ran six men. Peggy Lazenby met them, cried, "This way!" and led them to the still open hatchway. And a vastly amplified voice was booming from the ship, "Board at once, please! Board at once!"

Heraklion hustled his people into some sort of order, got them on to the gangway, the women first. He

stayed with Brasidus, making sure that the evacuation proceeded in an orderly manner. Still the two men waited, although the loudspeaker was blaring, "Get a move on, there! Get a move on!"

At last the six men and Peggy Lazenby were emerging from the hatch, she last of all. They were heavily burdened, all of them, and she, clasping it to her as tenderly as she had clasped the rescued child, carried the antique Log Book. "What are you waiting here for?" she demanded of Heraklion.

He said, "We have no spaceships, but we have read books. We know of the traditions. This Creche is *my* ship, and I shall be the last to leave."

"Have it your own way," she told him.

She and Brasidus went up the ramp after the six Marines. Heraklion followed them. Just as he reached the airlock a geyser of flame erupted from the open hatch and the once flat surface of the roof cracked and billowed and, as *Seeker* hastily lifted, collapsed.

"That *was* my ship. . ." whispered the Doctor.

"You can build another," Peggy told him.

"No," he said. "No. No longer do we have any excuse not to revert to the old ways."

"And *your* old ways," she said, "are not the old ways of Diomedes and his party. That is why he hated and feared you. But can you do it?"

"With your help," he said.

"That," she said, "is a matter for the politicians back home. But let's get out of this bloody airlock, and into the ship, before we fall out. It's a long way down. . ."

Brasidus, looking at the burning building far below, shuddered and drew back hastily. It was, as she had said, a long way down.

Chapter 24

The Night of the Long Knives was over — the Night of the Long Knives and the four action packed days and nights that had followed it. The power had fallen into the streets — and Admiral Ajax, warned by his own Intelligence Service of the scheduled assassinations of himself and his senior captains, had swooped down from the sky to pick it up. The Birth Machine was destroyed, the caste system had crumbled, and only the patrolling airships of the Navy kept Sparta safe from the jealous attentions of the other City States. Cresphontes — a mere figurehead — skulked in his Palace, dared make no public appearances.

Grimes and his *Seeker* had played little active part in quelling the disturbances — but always the spaceship had been there, hanging ominously in the clouds, always her pin-nacles had darted from one trouble spot to another, her Marines acting as ambulance men and firemen — but ambulance men and firemen backed by threatening weaponry to ensure that they carried out their tasks unmolested.

Brasidus had rejoined his own police unit — and, to his surprise, had found that greater and greater power and responsibilities were being thrust upon him. But it made sense. He knew the spacemen, had worked with them — and it was obvious to all that, in the final analysis they, and the great Federation that they represented, were the most effective striking force on the planet. They did

not strike, they were careful not to fire a single gun or loose a single missile — but they were there, and where they had come from there were more and bigger ships with even heavier armaments.

The Universe had come to Sparta — and the Spartans, in spite of centuries of isolationist indoctrination, had accepted the fact. Racial memory, Margaret Lazenby had said, long and deep-buried recollections of the Home World, of the planet where men and women lived and worked together in amity, where the womb was part of the living female body and not a complex, inorganic machine.

And then there was the last conference in John Grimes' day cabin aboard *Seeker*. The lieutenant commander sat behind his paper-littered desk, making a major production of filling and lighting his pipe. Beside him was Margaret Lazenby, trim and severe in uniform. In chairs facing the desk were the rotund little Admiral Ajax, the tall, saturnine Heraklion, and Brasidus. A stewardess brought coffee, and the four men and the woman sipped it, appreciatively.

Then Grimes said, "I've received my orders, Admiral. Somewhat garbled, as messages by psionic radio too often are, but definite enough. I have to hand over to the civil authorities and then get the hell out." He smiled bleakly. "I've done enough damage already. I fear that I shall have to do plenty of explaining to My Lords Commissioners."

"No, Commander." Heraklion's voice was firm, definite. "You did not do the damage. The situation, thanks to Diomedes, was 'ea' highly explosive. You were only the the. . ."

"The detonator," supplied Ajax.

"Just how explosive was it?" enquired Grimes. "I'd like to know. After all, I shall have a report to make." He switched on a small recorder that stood among the litter on his desk.

"Very explosive. Some of us at the Creche had decided to make women, not only for ourselves but for every man on Sparta. We had decided to revert to the old ways. Diomedes knew of this. I still think he was actuated by patriotism — a perverted patriotism, but patriotism nonetheless."

Peggy Lazenby laughed scornfully. "Fine words, Doctor. But what about that female baby who was exposed, the one that Brasidus and I rescued?"

"Yes, the Exposure. *That* was a custom that we intended to stamp out. But the unfortunate child, as well as being female, was mentally subnormal. She'd have been better off dead."

"So you say. But you forget that the planets of the Federation have made great strides in medical science during the centuries that you have been stagnating."

"Enough, Peggy. Enough," said Grimes tiredly. He put his pipe into a dirty ashtray, began to sort his papers. "As I told you, my orders are to hand over to the civil authorities. Who are they? The King? The Council?" The Spartans smiled scornfully. "All right. I suppose that you gentlemen will have to do. You, Doctor Heraklion, and you, Admiral Ajax, and you — just what rank *do* you hold these days? I've rather lost track — Brasidus. But before I hand over I want to be sure that the Admiral and friend Brasidus know what

it's all about. Heraklion knows, of course — but even the most honest of us is liable to bend the facts.

"This ship, as you know, is a unit of the fleet of the Federation's Survey Service. As such she carries, on microfilm, a most comprehensive library. One large section of it is devoted to colonising ships that went missing. We're still stumbling upon what are called the Lost Colonies, and it's helpful if we have more than a vague idea as to their origin. This Sparta of yours is, of course, a Lost Colony. We've been able to put together your history both from our own reference library and from the records salvaged from the Creche.

"So far, the history of colonisation comes under three headings. The First Expansion, the Second Expansion and the Third Expansion. The First Expansion was initiated before there was a practicable FTL — faster than light — drive. The Second Expansion was carried out by vessels fitted with the rather unreliable Ehrenhaft Drive, the so-called gaussjammers. The Third Expansion made use of timejammers, ships with the almost foolproof Mannschenn Drive.

"The vessels of the First Expansion, the Deep Freeze Ships, went a long way in a long time, a very long time. They carried at least three full crews — captains, watch-keeping officers, maintenance engineers and the like. The colonists, men and women, were in stasis, just refrigerated cargo, in effect. The crews spent their off-duty months in stasis. But there was, of course, always one full crew on duty.

"As a result of some incredible stupidity on somebody's part, the crews of many of the early ships were all male. In the later ones, of

course, the balance of the sexes was maintained. *DORIC* — the ship from which this Lost Colony was founded — had an all male crew, under First Captain — he was the senior of four Masters — Deems Harris. This same Captain Harris was, probably, a misogynist, a woman-hater, when the voyage started. If he were not, what happened probably turned him into one.

"Third Captain Flynn seems to have exercised little control over his officers — or, perhaps, he was the ring-leader. Be that as it may, Flynn decided, or was persuaded, to alleviate the monotony of his tour of duty by reviving a dozen of the more attractive colonist girls. It seems to have been quite a party while it lasted — so much so that normal ship's routine went by the board, so much so that vitally important navigational instruments, such as the Very Long Range Radar, were untended, ignored. The odds against encountering a meteoric swarm in Deep Space are astronomical — but *Doric* encountered them. Whether or not she would have been able to take avoiding action is doubtful — but with some warning *something* could have been done to minimise the effects of the inevitable collision. A collision there was — and the sphere in which the female colonists were housed was badly damaged, so badly damaged that there were no survivors. I should have explained before that these Deep Freeze* ships didn't look anything like a vessel such as this one; they consisted of globes held together by light girders. They were assembled in orbit and were never intended to make a landing on any planetary surface.

"Anyhow, Captain Flynn aroused

Captain Harris and the other Masters and their officers after the damage had been done. Captain Harris, understandably, took a more than somewhat dim view of his junior, and formed the opinion that if Flynn had not awakened those women the collision would not have occurred. Oddly enough, as his private journal indicates, he blamed the unfortunate wenches even more than he blamed Flynn. He despised Flynn for his weakness and irresponsibility — but those poor girls he *hated*. They were thrown into some sort of improvised brig.

"Meanwhile, *Doric* was far from spaceworthy. Apart from the slow leakage of precious atmosphere much of her machinery was out of kilter, the automated 'farm,' upon which the crew depended for their food and their atmospheric regeneration, especially. Although the world that you know as Sparta was not the ship's original objective — oddly enough, long range instrumental surveys had missed it — *Doric's* quite excellent equipment picked it up, made it plain to Captain Harris that he could reach it before air and food and water ran out. So, putting all hands save for himself and one officer back into stasis, he adjusted his trajectory and ran for this only possible haven.

"His troubles were far from over. The shuttles — relatively small rocket craft used as ferries between the big ship in orbit and the world below — had all been ruined by that meteoric shower. Nonetheless — it was a remarkable feat of spacemanship — he succeeded in getting that unhandy, unspaceworthy and unairworthy near wreck down through the atmosphere to a relatively soft landing.

"At first glance, the survivors were not too badly off. The planet was habitable. The fertilised ova of various animals — sheep, pigs, cattle, dogs and cats, even — had all been destroyed by the crash landing, but the local fauna was quite edible. And the ship had carried a large stock of seed grain. There was a decided imbalance of the sexes — the only women were Captain Flynn's hapless popsies, and there were all of five thousand men — but even that would right itself in time. The ship — as did all ships of that era — carried equipment that was the prototype of your Birth Machine, and there were supplies of deep-frozen sperm and ova sufficient to populate a dozen worlds.

"But. . .

"Twelve women, and five thousand and forty eight men. . .

"Rank, said Captain Flynn and some of the other officers, should have its privileges. It most certainly should not, said the colonists — among them, of course, the twelve men whose wives the women had been.

"There was trouble — starting off with a few isolated murders, culminating in a full scale revolt against the officers and those loyal to them. Somehow the twelve girls were. . . eliminated. Deems Harris doesn't say as much in his journal, but I gained the impression that he was behind it.

"Now, this Deems Harris. It is hard for us in this day and age of quick passages to get inside the skins, the minds of those old-time space captains. Probably none of them was quite sane. Most of them were omnivorous, indiscriminating readers, although some of them specialised. This Deems Harris seems to have done so.

In history. By this time, with his colony off to a disastrous beginning, he seems to have hankered after some sort of culture in which women played a very small part — or no part at all. One such culture was that of Sparta, one of the ancient Greek city states, back on Earth. Greek women were little more than child-bearing, house-keeping machines — and the Spartan women suffered the lowest status of them all. Sparta was the State that specialised in all the so-called manly virtues — and little else. Sparta was *the* military power. Furthermore, the original Spartans were a wandering tribe called Dorians. Dorians — *Doric*. . . See the tie-up? And their first king was Aristodemus. Aristodemus — Deems Harris.

"The first Aristodemus, presumably, kept women in their proper place — down, well down. This latter day Aristodemus would go one better. He would do without women at all." Grimes looked at Margaret Lazenby. "At times I think that he had some—" "He didn't have women — that's for certain. But go on."

"All right. Aristodemus — as we shall call him now — was lucky enough to command the services of like-minded Bio-Chemists. The sperm, of course, was all neatly classified— Male and Female being among the classifications. Soon that first Birth Machine was turning out a steady stream of fine, bouncing baby boys. When the adult populace started to get a bit restive it was explained that the stock of female sperm had been destroyed in the crash. And somebody made sure that the stock *was* destroyed."

"But," Brasidus interrupted, "but we used to reproduce by fission.

Our evolution from the lower animals has been worked out in detail."

"Don't believe everything you read," Peggy Lazenby told him. "Your biology text books are like your history text books — very cunningly constructed fairy tales."

"Yes," said Grimes. "Fairy tales. Aristodemus and his supporters were able to foist an absolutely mythical history upon the rising generations. It seems fantastic — but remember that there was no home life. They — like you, Brasidus, and like you, Admiral — knew only the Spartan State as a parent. There were no fathers and mothers, no grandfathers and no grandmothers, to tell the stories of how things used to be. Also, don't forget that the official history fitted the facts very neatly. It should have done — after all, it was tailormade.

"And so it went on — for year after year, for generation after generation, until it became obvious to the Doctors in charge of the Birth Machine that it couldn't go on much longer. The bank of male sperm was near exhaustion. This first crisis was surmounted — ways and means were devised whereby every citizen made his contribution to the plasm bank. A centrifuge was used to separate X-chromosome bearing sperm cells from those carrying the Y-chromosome. Then the supply of ova started to run out. But, still the race was in no real danger of extinction. All that had to be done was to allow a few female children to be born. In fact this did happen now and again by accident — but such unfortunates had always been exposed on the hillside as defective infants. Even so, the Doctors of those days

were reluctant to admit female serpents into this all-male paradise.

"And now Latterhaven comes into the story. I'm sorry to have to disappoint you all, but there never was a villainous Admiral Latterus. And, apart from the ill-fated *Doric*, there never were any spaceships owned by Sparta. But while Aristodemus was building his odd imitation of the original, Terran Sparta the First Expansion ran its course. Then, with the perfection (not that it was ever perfect) of the Ehrenhaft Drive came the Second Expansion. Finally, there was the Third Expansion, and there was the star ship *Utah*, commanded by Captain Amos Latter. It was Latter and his people who founded the colony — one run on rather more orthodox lines than yours — on Latterhaven, a world only a couple of light years from this one.

"The Latterhaveneers made explorations of the sector of Space around their new home. One such expedition stumbled upon Sparta. The explorers were lucky not to be slaughtered out of hand — the records indicate that they almost met such a fate — but they were not, and they dickered with the Spartan top brass, and all parties eventually signed a trade agreement. In return for the spice harvest Latterhaven would send two ships each Spartan year with consignments of unfertilised ova.

"The situation could have continued indefinitely if we hadn't come in — or if Diomedes hadn't found out about the Doctors' secret harem."

"The situation would not have continued," stated Heraklion. "As I've told you, Commander, it was our intention to introduce a reversion to the normal way of birth."

"That's your story and you stick to it. It could be true, I suppose; it would account for the way Diomedes hated you." He refilled and relit his pipe. "The question is — what happens now?"

"What does happen?" asked Admiral Ajax.

"To begin with, I've been recalled to Base. I shall have to make my report. It is possible that the Federation will replace your Birth Machine — although, come to that, you should be able to import materials and technicians from Latterhaven. You might even be able to build a new one for yourselves. But. . .

"But the Federation is apt to be a little intolerant of transplanted human cultures that deviate too widely from the norm. Your monosexual society, for example — and, especially, your charming custom of Exposure. This is your world and, as far as I'm concerned, you're welcome to it. I'm a firm believer in the Fifth Freedom — the freedom to go to hell your own way. But you've never heard a politician up on his hind legs blathering about the Holy Spirit of Man. If you want to reconstruct your society in your own way, in your own time, you'll have to fight — not necessarily with words and spears, with guns and missiles — for the privilege.

"I advise, strongly, that you send a representative with us, somebody who'll be able to talk sense with my lords and masters, somebody who'll be able to take a firm line."

"There's Brasidus. . ." said Peggy Lazenby softly, looking directly at him. *You and I have unfinished business*, her eyes said.

"Yes. There's Brasidus," agreed

Grimes. "After all, he knows us."

And he'll get to know us better. The unspoken words, her unuttered thought, sounded like a caressing voice in Brasidus' mind.

"But we need him," said Heraklion.

"A first class officer," confirmed Ajax. "He has what's left of the Police eating out of his hand."

"I think that one of *my* colleagues would be a better choice as emissary," said Heraklion.

"So. . ." murmured Grimes. "So. . ." He looked steadily across his desk at the Spartans. "It's up to you, Lieutenant or Colonel or whatever you are. It's up to you. I'm sure that Admiral Ajax will be able to manage without you — on the other hand, I'm sure that Dr. Heraklion's friend will prove a quite suitable envoy."

"It's up to you."

It's up to me, Brasidus thought. He looked at the woman sitting beside the space captain — and suddenly he was afraid. Diomedes' words about the frightening power wielded by this sex lingered in his mind. But, in the final analysis, it was not fear that prompted his answer, but a strong sense of responsibility, of loyalty to his own world. He knew — as the aliens did not, could never know — how precarious still was the balance of power. He knew that with himself in command — effective if not titular — of the ground forces peace might be maintained, the reconstruction be commenced.

"It's up to you," said Peggy Lazenby.

He said firmly, "I'd better stay."

She laughed — and Brasidus wondered if he alone were aware of the tinkling malice that brought an angry

(Continued on page 144)



SOMETHING FOR THE WOMAN

BY IVAR JORGENSEN

To the men who made and who would fly her the ship was a beautiful machine and the coming voyage an adventure to be savored. But to the women the ship was a menacing horror and the voyage not a pioneer's delight but a nightmarish intrusion which cut into their lives like some horribly unsterile butcher's tool.

SHE awoke at dawn and her awakening was an instantaneous thing, a sudden and stark transition to sharp consciousness.

And she thought how could I have slept at all? as her hand went automatically across to touch him — and to find him not there. Only the hollowed-out pillow beside her own on the hard floor in the dark, empty room.

She knew a moment of panic; a moment that lifted her and sent her running through the rooms — rooms cold and unfamiliar now in their emptiness — until she saw a streak of blessed light under the basement door.

He was coming up even as she flung the door open and there was something warm and steadying in the dark form of him against the light below. He said, "Nora," said it quietly, as he always spoke. "You should have slept longer. It may be difficult . . . later."

She did not answer, but stood shivering in her white nightgown, waiting for him, for the nearness of him which she needed so badly.

"Are the children awake too?"

"No — I don't think so."

He laughed; the silent chuckle she could feel rather than hear. "The time we had getting them to sleep. But once gone . . ." His thoughts turned to practical things. "The truck just left. I was listening for them so they wouldn't knock and awaken you."

"They took — the trunks?" It was hard to get the words out. They were so final. Nothing left now but their own four bodies and the clothing in which those bodies would be wrapped. So utterly final.

The whole thing had been somewhat like broad steps, one following another, down into a nightmare of quickening panic.

He looked at her there in the semi-darkness and then she could feel his hands touching her cheeks, lifting her head. "The big day, darling. What was it the senator called it? The *new* day. How does it feel to be one of the immortal hundred? That's what we'll be,

you know — immortal."

She was grateful for the darkness as she drew away, turned. "It's chilly. I must get some clothes on."

Alone in what had been their bedroom, she stooped to find her clothing; straightened and drew off the white nightgown; stood there shivering.

A stairway into gradually quickening panic. Not too bad when they had come in twos and threes to look at the house. Not even too bad when the house had been sold, because it was still there and all the familiar things were around her and the future seemed far away.

A little twinge the evening the man came to pick up the car — a slight quickening in her heart. At the last moment she'd remembered Patty's glove in the back seat; had called and gone to the curb to get it — from someone else's car, not theirs any more. Then the man had driven away.

The matter of the furniture had been as painless as such a thing could possibly be. Not a lot of people wandering through, touching, fingering. Just one — a gloomy man, striding in, naming a figure. Sudden, sharp, almost painless.

But they had come finally to haul it away; come with clumping shoes and big, rough, irreverent hands to lift the pieces. With

them had come the panic, and after they had filled the van and driven it away and the rooms were empty, the panic had remained.

The voices of Patty and Tom had helped a little. The laughing and chattering as they ran about, listening to their voices bounce off the naked walls, making a holiday out of everything. Some help, but only pinpoints of light in the darkness of the panic. Tiny stars against the smothering blanket of the night sky.

The night sky. Now, half dressed, fingers stiff, numb, she refused to think of the sky; dared not think of it, lest the pitiful little wall she'd managed to build up would crumble away completely and the panic would pour down on her like a raging flood.

Great Father in heaven. What idiocy have we agreed to? How insane and foolhardy can we get?

The zipper at the side of her dress gave her trouble. She seized upon the trouble like a thirsting person upon a jug of water and struggled, grim and grateful, with the stubborn tab.

But the tab gave and the zipper came smoothly together and she felt she had lost a friend.

The panic.

But held at bay by the shuffling of sleepy feet as Patty wobbled into the room. "Mom. You there, Mom? Why don't you turn on some lights? Time is it, Mom?"

"It's still early, dear. Why don't you go back to bed for a while?"

Fists in blue eyes. Then the sudden dawning. "Mom! This is it! The day! This is the day, Mom!" Patty whirled and danced away. "Tom! Wake up, sleepy head! This is the *day*! You going to sleep right through it?"

The smell of shag tobacco. The glowing pipe. And she knew he was in the room. She hadn't been aware, somehow, of his coming, but now he was there.

She turned, wanting to run to him and hide in his arms. More than anything in her whole life, she wanted to plead for reconsideration of this horrible thing they were about to do — this mad, insane thing.

But, instead, she slipped to the floor and sat nursing her knees as she drew on her shoes and laced them. She said, "I could hang the bedclothes over the windows. Then we could turn the lights on."

"Turn them on anyway — when you're ready. The children can dress in the bathroom. Maybe the neighbors would like to see how we spend our last morning."

She got to her feet, turning from him as she did so — afraid he would see the sickness welling into her eyes. And the thought was pounding against the walls of her brain.

Why am I like this — weak and spineless and silent? Why do I suffer so uselessly? Why don't I scream no — no — no — and that would be the end of it? It would be better for all of us.

But she remained silent. She snapped the light switch and the yellow glare against the bare walls swept away the last wisps of unreality the darkness had nurtured. This was the day — the new day. The threshold from which they would leap to madness.

"Mom — can we open the thermos bottles now? We're hungry and you said they were for breakfast."

She hurried from the bedroom, eager for the duty of supervising the meal. "Yes, you may as well. The large one is milk. Use the paper cups and then pour some of it on the shredded wheat under the napkins. You'll find sugar there —"

Tom laughed in the glee of youth and new awakening. "Mom! For cryi! We know how to eat!"

"Well . . . eat slowly. Don't bolt your food."

She opened the smaller thermos and poured coffee into a paper cup and handed it to him. He took it silently and waited until she had poured her own. Nothing was said or indicated, yet she sensed it as being — to him — a toast, a silent drinking between them to the thing they were about to do.

She glanced up now and saw the light of morning on the window pane. With the light came a new sensation — a new dread. Even time itself — she sensed — had joined the dread conspiracy against her and had changed its form. Time had now become a medium of graduating speed like a sled on the south hill in winter; creeping at first, dragging, but gradually increasing its speed until it was rushing inexorably forward toward the end.

Daylight — the last she would see in these rooms — in this house.

The shag tobacco perfumed the air as she gathered up the breakfast things and stacked them in a corner. They would be left there in a neat pile, and later the man who had bought the things would come and pick them up together with the sheets and blankets — to leave the house a mute, forlorn shell.

The relief of Patty's shrill voice. "It's light now, Daddy. Can I go? I'm supposed to say good-bye to Celia. She's getting up early and she's going to be on her porch waiting."

Tom, with importance: "I've got to go too, Dad. I'm giving Eddy my hunting knife. It was over the weight." He spoke with apology because the father had fashioned the knife as a birthday present for the son.

A few ounces of birthday gift

overweight. Great God! On such absurd trifles hang life and death.

"You can each have fifteen minutes — no more. Be back here sharp and prompt."

They were gone in a clatter while she finished with the dishes and went blindly from the room to gather up the bedding and fold it into patterns of absolute precision. He remained in the room where they had eaten their meal and she sensed his uncertainty, his indecision. She waited, holding a sheet spread motionless. Then his footsteps turned toward the basement steps and went down.

Alone, she stood toe to toe with the panic and slugged at it with flailing mental fists. Sobbing in silence, she gave ground.

The sheets and blankets were folded. The breakfast things aligned and realigned. Time rushed in a fresh acceleration and they were on the sidewalk, the car waiting, the neighbors calling good-byes in blurred unfocused words.

Strangely, the big black limousine brought a respite. The limousine was a moment of rest between rounds of slugging it out with the terror. The car was such a lovely, familiar thing; held tight to the pavement by its four big tires. Sane and sensible, bound by the laws of gravity which man had now learned to defy.

The limousine moved away from the curb and the town was astir. Stores were opening; awnings were being rolled down; sidewalks sloshed with hose water that ran into the gutters and carried a dust film on its back as it moved toward the sewer grates.

She saw all these things as they rode through the streets. The awnings and the water and the dust film; the early shoppers picking over the plump tomatoes and the pale celery on display. Saw and savored them with a feeling akin to desperation, because a woman uprooted must have something to cling to and the mind rushes invariably toward the dear familiar things.

Something to cling to. The man has his courage, his keen and dreaming eye. The child has his new love of living, his wonder at the freshly unfolding world, his flower-petal faith in the goodness of all things. But the woman . . .

How about something for the woman?

The thought formed, but only to be ridiculed by the silent hysterical laughter in her mind. Something to cling to. How absurd, when the very watchwords of this new madness were instability and emptiness. The future was the sky, and the sky sat on nothing. The empty sky. The dark and terrible sky. Nothing.

The limousine stopped by the wire gate. The door opened and

she got out. And there it was: the great gleaming space ship with the cluster of busy ants around its base; the doughty, cocky, insane little ants who had built it.

The space ship — and panic flooded in.

Oh, no. Not in there. Not trapped and smothered in that monstrous gleaming coffin. No.

The children were silent. They'd seen the ship before, but she knew it was not a thing to become familiar with. No matter how many times it was seen, its majestic lines, the prophetic tilt of it, the things it implied and stood for, would always engender an awed silence.

She was aware now of the crowds watching through the wire fence. The lucky ones who would stay on Earth. She moved along, unresisting, in the directed sweep of the chosen hundred families. The mad ones who would go.

They had erected a platform of adaptable steel tubing and planks because this was a great occasion and the important people — the politicians, the great-brained planners, the spotlight-seekers, the video-screen crowders — would want a place of vantage.

Seats had been provided for the chosen hundred where they could face the platform and listen while the orators told them how lucky they were. Distinguished speakers — one after another — got up be-

fore the microphone to confess envy and wax remindful of native heritage, pioneer blood and similar inanity.

She sat listening and there was paradox in the fact that she hated it and yet prayed that it go on and on. Anything to postpone the final walk down the cement ribbon and up into the bowels of that shining nightmare.

She began counting. First the number of people on the platform, then the number who had spoken, subtracting and trying to translate people and words into minutes and seconds of reprieve.

But common sense took over to destroy this pitiful subterfuge. As though the space ship waited upon a shallow wash of words! As though the sweep of sun and planet and asteroid could be held spellbound and waiting by the whisperings of top-hatted ants on a wooden platform.

The equations had been worked out, the molten metal cooled into lean, space-riding patterns; the snarling atomic furnace had been lighted and was, even now, keening in blue-hot agony. The ship would roar away upon a split second timed to the march of galaxies, not the flow of windblown eloquence.

She turned her eyes down the long cement ribbon and a wall grew across it; across the avenue

to the ship and across her mind; a wall molded steel-strong of the formless panic she'd lived with day and night.

I can't do it. I can't get into that flying coffin and be blasted up off the Earth. I'm a woman with all a woman's frailties and none of the strengths a few rare and wonderful women have been given. They liken us to pioneers crossing Early American plains with oxen and covered wagons. A lie. A trap for the stupid. No matter what hardships they bore, their feet were always close to the Earth they lived on and died on. The solid Earth. Something to cling to. A final warmth to be buried in.

I can't do it.

She would have to tell him; tell him soon, because the talking had ended. The president and the mayor and the senators had gotten up from their chairs and were filing down the steps of the platform. They would go first along the cement ribbon toward the ship and the pioneers would follow.

Already the one hundred chosen families — the ninety-nine husbands with their rare and wonderful women — were getting up from the chairs in respect for the president and the dignitaries. All the brave children were silent, awed with this final moment.

Patty and Tom stood close to each other, staring again at the ship, and the smell of shag to-

bacco was on the breeze.

He stood beside her, his keen dreamer's eyes, narrowed and finely crow-footed, testing the sky for a sign of good fortune. His mind was already up there — far away.

But he lowered his eyes as the crowd surged forward, leaving a space around them that was comparative isolation. He reached over and took her hand in his and she could see that his mind and heart were not among the stars but there on the ground beside her and very close. He smiled.

The smile went down into her face and from there into her own heart along with the quiet words he spoke. "Have I told you lately how much I love you?"

She should have laughed and had an answer as she had always had an answer when he had spoken thus before — before the panic. But she could not.

"It's true. I've been meaning to tell you. That thing over there is only a space ship. This is nothing but a blasting field. Where we're going and what we're planning to do isn't very outstanding beside the really important thing — that I love you. Loving you is the only complete and satisfactory job I've ever done." The clutch of his hand was tight and warm with her own inside. And she knew what his next word would be before it came.

"Okay?"

She smiled and answered him with the word she always used. "Okay."

Then they were swept forward with the crowd, and the isolation vanished. From the habit of months and weeks and days she sought again for the panic.

But it had vanished also.

Strange, she thought. But then she knew, with a giddy sense of joy, that it was not strange at all. The panic had been replaced,

shouldered out by something she had somehow allowed herself to forget. Something for the woman. The only thing, after all, to which the woman can cling. The thing that was formed when the woman was formed. Love.

She danced along with the crowd and heard Patty and Tom laughing, and now the ship loomed above them. She looked up into the bright sky against which a million spinning worlds were forever anchored. The solid, steel-riveted, eternal sky. She looked at the space ship and laughed.

Hello, you. Be a good monster and take us out to Mars.

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BRAVE NUDE WORLD

FORREST J. ACKERMAN

Only a (you should excuse the expression) bare handful of science fiction fans (and pros) are known to be practicing (or perfect) nudists. In times past Theodore Sturgeon's name has been associated with East Coast sunbathing activities and Forrest J. Ackerman's with similar Western proclivities. ("There is no truth to the rumor, however," Ackerman informs us, "that when asked if he ever indulged in sunbathing, Robert Bloch replied, 'No, I'm only interested in bathing daughters.'") Forry freely admits: "For a period of about 6 years I frequently frequented several of the local nudist camps, often in the company of fellow fan, artists and writers. The only reason I gradually grew away from outings among the skinfolk is that, regrettably, no nudist camps are really 'local' to me and as I grew older I grew tired of fighting the freeway traffic in order to traffick with nature the Free Way."

As an author in what he terms "the Old Genre" Ackerman has had over 500 stories and articles published since 1929 and has won a Hugo and its Japanese equivalent. He has been translated into French, German, Dutch, Swedish, Spanish, Italian, Japanese and Esperanto (he parolas the latter) and has been broadcast in Switzerland as well as appearing in person on TV (always plugging for science fiction) in such diverse places as Bruxelles

(Belgium) and Ljubljana (Jugoslavia). He has acted in the scientifilm *THE TIME TRAVELLERS*. His collection of imaginative memorabilia consists of approximately 100,000 books, magazines, photos, paintings, movie scripts, original manuscripts, etc., the foundation of a \$1 million library/museum.

In the following feature, rescued from the pages of the *American Sunbather* (the Official Journal of the American Sunbathing Association) we learn not only a good deal about what science-fictioners have had to say about buff-buffs but gain an interesting insight into Ackerman's attitude toward science fiction per se, his frame of mind that has been a way of life and kept his interest incandescent for 42 years in the field in which he is known as Mr. Science Fiction.

THE *Naked and the Deb* is a science fiction story which takes place about 10 years from now. In it, a young Bostonian is making her debut in smart society. She meets up with a "rockjoek" (pilot of a globe-circling passenger rocket). She is conversationally baited by him when she makes a derogatory remark that reveals her antipathy towards nudism.

"If God had meant us to be nudists," author Spencer Strong has his rocketeer say, "I believe we would have been born without clothes!"

Starla, the debutante, is quick to

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agree. When the subtle reversal of the verbal trap hits her like a rocket crashing, she blushing tries to cover her confusion.

By 1968 standards of dress, Starla would have much to conceal and more to blush about as, according to the author's description, she's clad only in a *trina-vikkini*—a two-piece garment (?) that already reveals about 99 per cent of her aristocratic epidermis.

The *trina* portion of her sartorial ensemble is described as "the opposite of a strapless bra, a kind of bra-less strap."

The *vikkini* is apparently a modified bikini, the ultimate z-string, owing its inspiration to Vikki Dougan, the provocatively posterioed pioneer of the late 1950's who, as an actress, stressed the attraction of "hindsight" over foresight.

Enough preamble.

Now let's talk specifically about science fiction and nudism.

I assume you already have at least a bare idea of what nudism is.

But science fiction.

To begin with, science fiction is more than a skin-deep reading pastime. As nudism is an unornamental way of life, so science fiction is a mental. It's a literature of ideas and ideals. A fascinating forum of disciplined discussion.

Science fiction is a literary laboratory, where the pro's and just-suppose of semantics, cybernetics, soma drugs, Esperanto, automation and automations, immortality, extra terrestrial life, Utopia vs. Dystopia, and a thousand and one theories and discoveries more amazing than the Arabian Nights are imaginatively extrapolated by authors with inquiring minds.

Historian Sam Moskowitz has described it: "Stories of science with a sixth sense of Wonder."

I personally have read science fiction as an almost exclusive literary diet non-stop since 1926. When it was first suggested to me that I do an article on science fiction's attitude toward nudism, I realized that offhand I didn't recall too much discussion of the subject. I knew my own reaction: passively favorable. At that time I had not yet actually visited a nudist park, although my wonderful grandparents had taken me as a teenager to see the film *Elysia, Valley of the Nude*, I had gone by myself later on to see *Unashamed*, and my mother and father were calculated casual (I realized in retrospect as an adult) about appearing nude and nonchalant around the house in the presence of my brother and myself so that we would suffer no embarrassments or attach no taboos to the sight of the unclad body.

Yet all I could say about the science fictional viewpoint on nudism was that, after more than a quarter century reading "sci-fi," I couldn't recall anything *negative*.

I knew I very much respected and admired, as indeed does the entire science fiction field, a top S. F. author whose photo I had recognized on several occasions in nudist magazines. Later I learned a leading anthologist was a nudist, even some of my local science fiction fan friends—and a couple of my literary clients! The nudist circle suddenly made a small world of the worlds without end of my sci-fi acquaintances!

So I researched science fiction as it has concerned itself with nudism, and here is my

SKINSEY REPORT

Second Stage Lensman is a novel by Edward E. Smith, Ph.D., one of the patriarchs of S.F. authorship. It is one title out of a set of six books that constitutes a tremendous imaginary history of Future Civilization.

In chapter 3 of the title under discussion, Kimball Kinnison, with the rank of Gray Lensman in the Galactic Patrol, lands on a world called Lyrane.

"He was not surprised," Dr. Smith relates, "that the people in and around the airport were human to at least ten places of classification; he had expected that from the planetary data. Nor was he surprised at the fact that they wore no clothing. He had learned long since that, while most human or near-human races—particularly the women—wore at least a few ornaments, the wearing of clothing as such, except when it was actually needed for protection, was far more the exception than the rule. And, just as a Martian, out of deference to conventions, wears a light robe upon Tellus (Earth), Kinnison as a matter of course stripped to his evenly-tanned hide when visiting planets upon which nakedness was *de rigueur*. He had attended more than one state function, without a quibble or a qualm, tastefully attired in his Lens." For the enlightenment of the neo-science-fiction reader: the Lens is an object worn on the wrist.

In Peter Martin's splendid book *Summer in Three Thousand*, a modern man finds himself in the world of the 31st Century. The people of this distant day customarily sleep nude and seldom dress until after breakfast. Our hero's hostess at one point admonishes him:

"Now listen, unless you strip off

both that garment and your silly prejudice, which has been dead for hundreds of years, I shall most certainly not go traveling with you."

He quickly complies.

Later he asks: "If you are all so contented without clothes in this place which is everywhere quite warm enough, why bother to dress?" The 31st century woman gives this explanation:

"Only because we don't spend all day eating. Clothing protects. A naked skin is very vulnerable. And besides, without clothes one looks always the same. That is dull. With clothes there is no need ever to be twice the same."

In any event, the amount of clothing worn in 3000 A.D. is minuscule, feather-light and often translucent or even transparent.

Robert A. Heinlein has an eyepopper of an opener for his anthropologized *Year of the Jackpot*: "At first Potiphar Breen did not notice the girl who was undressing."

He goes on: "She was standing at a bus stop only ten feet away. He was indoors, but that would not have kept him from noticing; he was seated in a drugstore booth adjacent to the bus stop; there was nothing between Potiphar and the young lady but plate glass and an occasional pedestrian. Nevertheless he did not look up when she began to peel."

In this Heinlein *Jackpot*, abnormal behavior suddenly becomes the norm. All over the country, women start disrobing in public. As Potiphar Breen observes: "One case, shocking; over three hundred makes it scientifically interesting."

Meanwhile, back at the striptease, the author recounts: "By now the

amateur ecadysiast was practically down to the buff. It seemed to Potiphar Breen that she had quite a lot of buff, yet she had not pulled much of a house."

Knowing me to be an infamously complete science fiction bibliophile, the same Robert Heinlein of *Jackpot* once called to my attention a book I might otherwise have overlooked: *World Without Raiment*, by Louise Dardenelle.

In the Dardenelle version of the future, some time soon the world goes nudist for the simplest reason: most every substance on earth, and especially clothing, mysteriously disintegrates.

Instructive dialogue from *World Without Raiment*:

Dolores: "I'm puzzled to know, Adria, why you are so white, and I'm tanned as brown as a berry. Hasn't your body ever seen the sunshine before?"

Adria: "No, really. But don't you wear clothes, sometimes, Dolores? Even when it's cold?"

Dolores: "No, we never do. You see, in this colony we are proud and happy to admit we are part of Nature. We live as Nature intended, and the result is complete happiness."

Adria: "I'm getting used to going without clothes, after tramping all night through woods and brush without them. I never thought a person could get used to it so quickly."

Dolores: "Then you are a natural-born naturist at heart."

Chapter XI of *World Without Raiment* is titled Nudist Utopia, and opens with:

"All right, get up and dress, and come with me."

"Dress?" said Adria, puzzled; "what shall I put on?"

"A coat of yellow sunshine!" was the happy rejoinder.

Shades of Marilyn Monroe, who once admitted when she posed for her world-famous calendar she "had nothing on but the radio!"

Nymph of Darkness. In 1934, I dreamed of a beautiful nude inhabitant of the planet Venus, and named her Nyusa. In collaboration with authoress Catherine "Shamblau" Moore, whose supernally bewitching other-worldly women rarely wore much if any clothing, the tale of Nyusa was told and sold. The only trouble with the nude *Nymph of Darkness* was that she was invisible!

In 1956, I revived the pet concept of the invisible nude Venus girl, this time naming her N'vyonnaise and collaborating on her with Morgan Ives. The published result: *The Naughty Venusienne*, republished for the benefit of nudity aficionados in Sweden as *Stygg Flicka fran Venus*. This time my hero got at least a hazy idea of what his Venus-with-arms looked like by dusting her with talcum powder!

Of course, censorship being what it was a quarter century ago when the film *Things To Come* was conceived, showing 21st century man as nudist would have been inconceivable. Still, I admit to being shocked that so great and unshackled a mind as that of H. G. Wells, the film's conceptor, did not encompass nudism, at least his published memorandum to the costume designers for the 2036 sequence of the picture do not picture him as pro-nudist:

"People in the future will not wear costumes of cellophane illuminated by neon lights or anything extravagant

of that sort. Do bear in mind that the most extravagant costumes known in the world are those made by savages for ceremonial dances and the like.

"For reasons that I have given again and again—the fact that in the future various light apparatus such as radio, electric torch, notebook, will have to be carried on the person and that this will probably necessitate a widening of those broadly padded shoulders which are already necessary in the costume of contemporary men because of their wallets and fountain pens—I anticipate a costume, broad on the shoulders and fine about the legs and feet, with a fairly simple coiffure, more reminiscent of 'Tudor' (Renaissance) style than anything else the world has seen. Fine materials we want but not extraordinary materials.

"Future clothing will have a *style*, but within the limits of that style it will be very varied. Some women, especially the younger and shapelier, will dress like youths, but there are invincible aesthetic reasons why a certain number of them should have considerable skirts. In a clean indoor city, there will be no hygienic objections to quite long skirts."

Then, alas, comes the damning Wellsian ukase: "The future people are not going to be nudists—neither Adamites nor angels. Fine clothes, and dignified clothes, please, for the new world."

Well, remind me to check Mr. Wells' prophecy, come 2036: whether I'm wearing aged-on-the-spine bare skin that year, or trying to crowd my superpadded shoulders into a Tudor sedan.

The World Below is a tour-de-forceful picturization of life on our planet

half a million years hence! A sylphan, sea-like quasi-woman of this far removed age (author S. Fowler Wright refers to her simply as the Amphibian) forms a strange symbiotic relationship with a man who time travels hence from our own era. When the Amphibian and the Time Traveler are first becoming accustomed to each other, she regards him with contempt and he asks her why.

"She replied that, as I was a strange creature to her, she could only judge me by the degree of intelligence which I exhibited, but that a species of any eminence could hardly be content to exist in bodies so ugly, so awkward, and so badly made. She added that many of the lowest creatures of the ocean floor possessed bodies which were complete and sufficient without extraneous coverings.

"I replied that the human body was not necessarily insufficient, but that clothing might be worn from a sense of shame, or as an ornament only.

"She said that she understood the sense of shame, which she should feel very strongly herself if she were burdened with such a body, but if I regarded my clothes as ornamental, it was a point on which we must differ; and, in that case, the wearing of clothes confessed me to be an inferior, even among my own kind, as a Leader naturally would not enter into such a competition."

A Leader naturally would be nude? Shades of Donald Johnson's *The Nude-ist Candidate!*

Another Johnson, named Owen, in 1931 had published a "satiristic speculation on the scientific future of civilization" called *The Coming of the Amazons*. In it, one John Bogardus

awoke in the year 2181. When an Amazon named Acquilla escorts the hero to the chamber where he's to go beddy-bye, he asks, "But where are the bed clothes?"

"Bed clothes?" There is an amusing misunderstanding on Acquilla's part and she inquires if in Bogardus' time people put on clothes to go to bed. Of course, many of them did, but he explains to her that he meant sheets, a blanket, bedspread, comforter.

"What!" exclaims the Amazon, "You actually slept beneath all that! How un-hygienic! No wonder you all died young!"

"But I shall catch my death of cold!" protests Bogardus.

"Don't you realize, my dear," counters Acquilla, "that the human body like any other animal body craves air and sunshine? Throw off your toga and try the couch. As for catching cold, that is impossible. We adjust the temperature of the room by this thermostat."

"And you sleep without anything on the whole year round?"

"Naturally."

As Bogardus drifts off to sleep, thoughts of his 20th century inhibitions flit through his mind. "Ridiculous!" he tells himself. "Yes, even

archaic, such prudery! For after all I freely acknowledge the superiority of this new self-unconsciousness. Besides, even in my day were there not enfranchised spirits on the beaches of Scandinavia and Russia, to say nothing of Germany? Yes, Acquilla is right."

In *The Bare Fact*, by George H. Smith, by mistake a present-day burlesqueen is timeported to the 25th century. April Dawn reports of her experience: "I took one look at the platformful of strange people standing around staring at me, and you can't imagine how shocked I was. There wasn't a one in the whole bunch that had a stitch of clothes on! You you would have thought it was a stripper's convention, except that half of them were men."

Striptease artist April Dawn is a victim of technological unemployment in a world without raiment! But finally, with a g-string, pasties and 20th century cunning, she comes up with a solution: she becomes the 25th century's first—*dresser*! When the audience yells, "Put it on!" Dawn has what might be called a clothes call.

Summing up: all in all I think sci-fi pretty well sees aye-to-aye with nudism.

Continued from page 40

chocosm—the world of the creeps—began to die, there would be a lot of broken minds. It was sad, in a sense.

But it gave him faith. For as the minds began to die, the war would have to end. The psychocosm—where the lab had been—perhaps in a sense

it was the conscience of the world.

Outside, there was a war to fight—a just war.

"Take care of Nora," he said to the WAC. "I've got to go help at headquarters."

The End

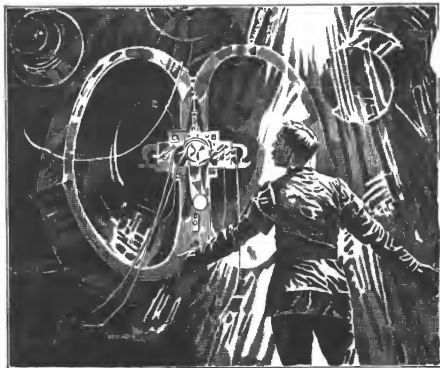
A PORTFOLIO-WHEN THE SLEEPER WAKES

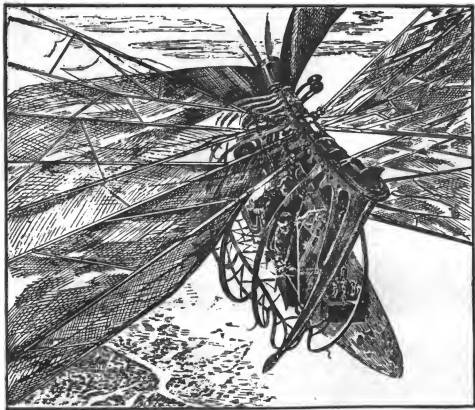
H.G. WELLS

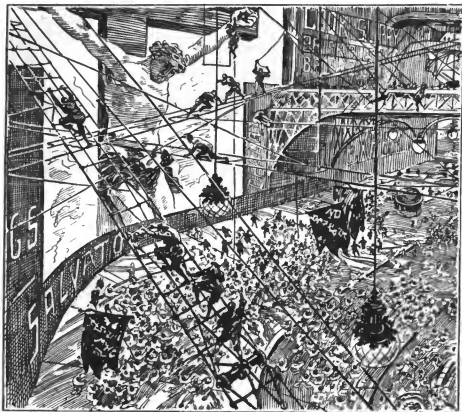
Illustrated by Original Artist

In 1928 when "When The Sleeper Wakes" appeared in AMAZING STORIES QUARTERLY, the identity of the artist who had done the original illustrations for Wells' classic tale had already been lost. The 1928 blurb simply read "... by an English author . . ."—and now some forty years later we seem to have come no nearer a solution.

So until someone can come up with a better byline we herewith present for your enjoyment a portfolio of some of the original illustrations for "When The Sleeper Wakes," each one laboriously wrought "by an English artist."







FANTASY BOOKS

FRITZ LEIBER

KING KULL, CONAN, CONAN THE ADVENTURER, CONAN THE WARRIOR, CONAN THE USURPER, CONAN THE CONQUEROR, by Robert E. Howard, with posthumous collaborative and editorial assists from L. Sprague de Camp, Lin Carter, and Glenn Lord, 60 cents each, Lancer Books, 185 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016

Reviewed by Fritz Leiber

The best pulp sword-and-sorcery writer was Robert Erwin Howard, 1906-36. He grew out of Jack London, Sax Rohmer, and Edgar Rice Burroughs.

A writing demon gripped him for ten years. Then he shot himself.

A short career, yet in little more time Burroughs did all his real writing. The first Tarzan book was published in 1912, the tenth (and last of the good ones) in 1924. All the best Mars and Pellucidar stories were written during the same period and also the outstanding singles such as *The Land That Time Forgot*. He was 37 when his writing demon possessed him. After it left him he spent 26 more years imitating himself, sometimes almost humorously, and managing the Tarzan empire.

Ten to a dozen years is all any man can stand of chain-taking gutsy, far-out, all-out typewriter trips through the bloody opium jungle and harsh hashish wilderness of Burroughs-Howard fantasy.

Howard had a murkier mind than

Burroughs, but ten times the poetry.

Among some of those hipped on heroic fantasy, it has been an aesthetic posture to rate Howard's two early King Kull stories over his 17 Conan tales. Now there have been discovered and printed here—nine for the first time—ten more Kull stories, seven completed by Howard himself. They range from lean and intense legends such as "Exile of Atlantis" to grotesque metaphysical adventures such as "Skull of Silence," where positives become negatives (sound is the absence of silence, being is the absence of nothingness) and the new positives—silence and nothingness—threaten to engulf the universe.

Kull was an Atlantean savage who made himself king of ancient Valusia, thereafter brooding fascinatedly over the beauty and degeneracy of his world and occasionally rising in red wrath to destroy the evil he found in it.

But Kull was a flop at selling to *Weird Tales*. So Howard destroyed the Valusian world in a cataclysm and from its remnants built the far less shadowy, realer, richer, and more salable world of the Hyborian Age. The Atlanteans survive as the still savage Cimmerians, so Conan of Cimmeria is essentially a new Kull. Gone are the puzzled brooding, the metaphysical preoccupations, the Macbeth figure of the stalwart, simple soldier encountering mystery and evil. Instead we have a clearheaded chaser of wealth, women, and adventure, a superman

who loves fighting, yet sticks to a decent code, a good-hearted thief and killer who shows wisdom, broadmindedness, and responsibility when he achieves power.

The best Conan stories are Howard's best. "The People of the Black Circle" can be compared without straining to the melodramas of Marlowe. It has stirring language, strong motives, awesome sorcerers, brilliant magical devices, sympathetic hero-villains, and a Conan subdued enough to make the outcome interesting. Same goes for "Beyond the Black River," and to a lesser degree, "The Phoenix on the Sword," *Conan the Conqueror*, etc.

The worst Conan stories—"The Slithering Shadow," "Red Nails," and "The Jewels of Gwahlor"—are repetitious and childish, a self-vitiating brew of pseudo-science, stage illusions, and the "genuine" supernatural, though a furious effort is made to hold the interest with exotic maniacs and hopheads sneaking through endless corridors, Lovecraftian monsters ravaging, girls whipping girls, scenes of butcher-shop carnage, and the like.

Howard's best prose: (while a king dies) "Outside, the moan of the tortured thousands shuddered up to the stars which crusted the sweating Vendhyan night, and the conches bellowed like oxen in pain;" (spoken by a demon to a man about to die) "But a bat has flown over the Mountains of the Dead and drawn your image in blood on the white tiger's hide that hangs before the long hut where sleep the Four Brothers of the Night. The great serpent coils about their feet and the stars burn like fireflies in their hair."

Howard's worst prose is like a rav-

ing newspaper editorial: (of a girl being raped by a monster) "All the obscenity and salacious infamy spawned in the muck of the abysmal pits of Life seemed to drown her in seas of cosmic filth."

Despite Conan's relative mental health, there is about the stories a persistent xenophobia, an over-preoccupation with violence, and a gloomy conviction (beautifully put) of the ultimate failure of man's best efforts toward peace: "Barbarism is the natural state of mankind. Civilization is unnatural. It is a whim of circumstance. And barbarism must always ultimately triumph." (Civilization is the absence of barbarism.) In short, an Aryan-Anglo-American conviction that most of the rest of the world is persistently evil and utterly untrustworthy.

Finally, for Howard himself, Conan went away and the puzzledly brooding Kull returned in one of his sick moods, and with him the dreadfully attractive, positive nothingness, and the gun that had shot at imaginary enemies was turned on the author.

Some say, "Enjoy the Conan yarns as hot-blooded, heroic escape-fiction. Why get serious about them?" Nonsense! Anything I like as well as I do some of the Conan stories, I do the courtesy of taking seriously when I write about it.

These four Conan novels are number one, four, five, six and seven of the saga. With brooding covers by Frank Frazetta, they and *King Kull* are an outstanding buy. Two and three should contain six more all-Howard Conan tales, including the excellent "Black Colossus" and "Queen of the Black Coast."

flush to his face. "Have it your own way, duckie. But I warn you—when those tough, pistol-toting bid-dies of the Galactic Peace Corps get here you'll wonder what's struck you."

"That will do, Peggy." Grimes' voice snapped with authority. "That will do. Now, gentlemen, you must excuse us. We have to see our ship secured for Space. How soon can you get your envoy here, Dr. Heraklion?"

"About an hour, Commander."

"Very good. We shall lift ship as soon as he's on board." He got to his feet, shook hands with the three

Spartans. "It's been a pleasure working with you. It's a great pity that it was not in pleasanter circumstances."

This was dismissal. Ajax in the lead, the three men walked out of Grimes' cabin. Brasidus, bringing up the rear, heard Peggy Lazenby say softly, "The poor bastard!"

And he heard Grimes reply, in a voice that held an unexpected bitterness, "I don't know. I don't know. He could be lucky."

For a long while Brasidus wondered what they meant — but the day came at last when he found out.

Continued from page 4

them, and from them conceived the idea of writing a book about a naval captain of that period. Notice, the idea of the *setting* came first; all that lovely gim crackery. In no way different from the SF author who says "what if" then writes about it. Never "who if," for that is the realm of the mainstream novelist. The idea is hero and the hero himself fits into the best role that will illuminate the idea.

The reason SF authors read Forester is that he does it so well. His sails rustle, the hull creaks and you can smell the burnt gunpowder. There is much they can learn from the Hornblower stories. The most important thing they can learn is how to flesh out their characters, to put real human beings into their stories.

Of more than passing interest is the fact that Forester wrote one science fiction novel, *THE PEACEMAKER*, which was published in 1934. What appears to be a condensed version, "Published by special arrangement with the author," came out in the February 1948 *FAMOUS FANTASTIC MYSTERIES*. There is a bit of a mystery here. This book is listed in the "Books by" credits in every book he published right up through the 1950's. Then it starts vanishing. It doesn't appear in the 1959 Penguin edition of *THE GUN*, nor in any other book after that, including the definitive *THE HORNBLOWER COMPANION*. I wonder why? Did Forester think ill of this novel? Was he ashamed of writing science fiction? I wonder what the answer is . . .



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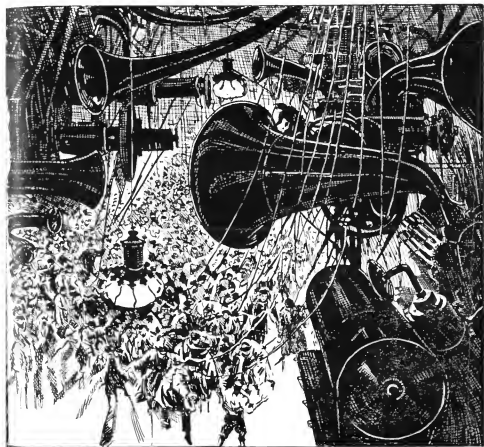
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